The FACE OF THE FIELDS

By DALLAS LORE SHARP

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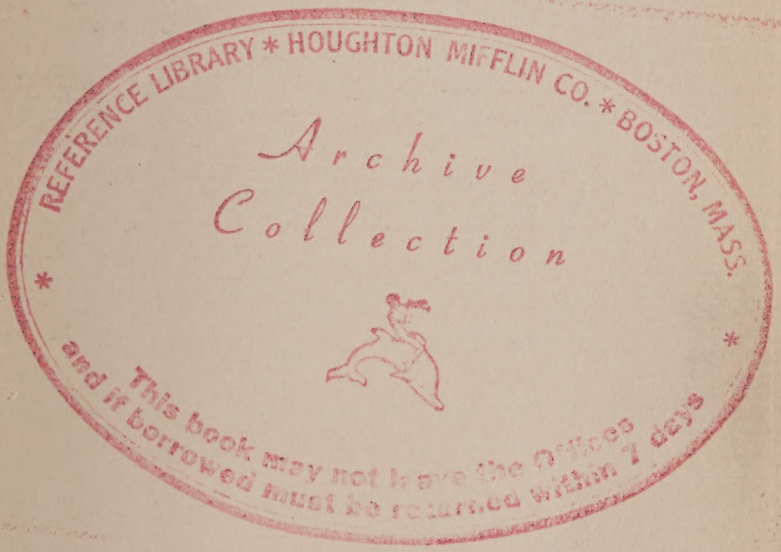
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By Dallas Lore Sharp

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THE FACE OF THE FIELDS

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BY

DALLAS LORE SHARP

AUTHOR OF "WILD LIFE NEAR HOME," "ROOF AND MEADOW," AND "THE LAY OF THE LAND"

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TO MY GOOD FRIEND

HINCKLEY GILBERT MITCHELL

HONEST SCHOLAR

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I

THE FACE OF THE FIELDS

THE FACE OF THE FIELDS

HERE was a swish of wings, a flash of gray, a cry of pain, a squawking, cowering, scattering flock of hens, a weakly fluttering pullet, and yonder, swinging upward into the October sky, a marsh hawk, buoyant and gleaming silvery in the sun. Over the trees he beat, circled once, and disappeared.

The hens were still flapping for safety in a dozen directions, but the gray harrier had gone. A bolt of lightning could not have dropped so unannounced, could not have vanished so completely, could scarcely have killed so quickly. I ran to the pullet, but found her dead. The harrier's stroke, delivered with fearful velocity, had laid head and neck open as with a keen knife. Yet a fraction slower and he would have missed, for the pullet caught the other claw on her wing. The gripping talons slipped off the long quills, and the hawk swept on without his quarry. He dared not come back for it at my feet; and

so with a single turn above the woods he was gone.

The scurrying hens stopped to look about them. There was nothing in the sky to see. They stood still and silent a moment. The rooster *chucked.* Then one by one they turned back into the open pasture. A huddled group under the hen-yard fence broke up and came out with the others. Death had flashed among them, but had missed *them.* Fear had come, but had gone. Within two minutes — in less time — from the fall of the stroke, every hen in the flock was intent at her scratching, or as intently chasing the gray grasshoppers over the pasture.

Yet, as they scratched, the high-stepping cock would frequently cast up his eye toward the tree-tops; would sound his alarum at the flight of a robin; and if a crow came over, he would shout and dodge and start to run. But instantly the shadow would pass, and instantly chanticleer —

> He loketh as it were a grim leoun,
> And on his toos he rometh up and doun;
> . . . . . .
> Thus roial, as a prince is in an halle.

He was n't afraid. Cautious, alert, watchful he

was, but not fearful. No shadow of dread hangs dark and ominous across the sunshine of his pasture. Shadows come — like a flash; and like a flash they vanish away.

We cannot go far into the fields without sighting the hawk and the snake, the very shapes of Death. The dread Thing, in one form or another, moves everywhere, down every wood-path and pasture-lane, through the black close waters of the mill-pond, out under the open of the winter sky, night and day, and every day, the four seasons through. I have seen the still surface of a pond break suddenly with a swirl, and flash a hundred flecks of silver into the light, as the minnows leap from the jaws of the pike. Then a loud rattle, a streak of blue, a splash at the centre of the swirl, and I see the pike, twisting and bending in the beak of the kingfisher. The killer is killed; but at the mouth of the nest-hole in the steep sand-bank, swaying from a root in the edge of the turf above, hangs the black snake, the third killer, and the belted kingfisher, dropping the pike, darts off with a cry. I have been afield at times when one tragedy has followed another in such rapid and continuous succession as to put a whole shining,

singing, blossoming world under a pall. Everything has seemed to cower, skulk, and hide, to run as if pursued. There was no peace, no stirring of small life, not even in the quiet of the deep pines; for here a hawk would be nesting, or a snake would be sleeping, or I would hear the passing of a fox, see perhaps his keen hungry face an instant as he halted, winding me.

Fox and snake and hawk are real, but not the absence of peace and joy — except within my own breast. There is struggle and pain and death in the woods, and there is fear also, but the fear does not last long; it does not haunt and follow and terrify; it has no being, no substance, no continuance. The shadow of the swiftest scudding cloud is not so fleeting as this shadow in the woods, this Fear. The lowest of the animals seem capable of feeling it; yet the very highest of them seem incapable of dreading it; for them Fear is not of the imagination, but of the sight, and of the passing moment.

The present only toucheth thee !

It does more, it throngs him — our fellow mortal of the stubble field, the cliff, and the green sea. Into the present is lived the whole of his life —

none of it is left to a storied past, none sold to a mortgaged future. And the whole of this life is action; and the whole of this action is joy. The moments of fear in an animal's life are moments of reaction, negative, vanishing. Action and joy are constant, the joint laws of all animal life, of all nature, from the shining stars that sing together, to the roar of a bitter northeast storm across these wintry fields.

We shall get little rest and healing out of nature until we have chased this phantom Fear into the dark of the moon. It is a most difficult drive. The pursued too often turns pursuer, and chases us back into our burrows, where there is nothing but the dark to make us afraid. If every time a bird cries in alarm, a mouse squeaks with pain, or a rabbit leaps in fear from beneath our feet, we, too, leap and run, dodging the shadow as if it were at our own heels, then we shall never get farther toward the open fields than Chuchundra, the muskrat, gets toward the middle of the bungalow floor. We shall always creep around by the wall, whimpering.

But there is no such thing as fear out of doors. There was, there will be; you may see it for an

instant on your walk to-day, or think you see it; but there are the birds singing as before, and as before the red squirrel, under cover of large words, is prying into your purposes. The universal chorus of nature is never stilled. This part, or that, may cease for a moment, for a season it may be, only to let some other part take up the strain; as the winter's deep bass voices take it from the soft lips of the summer, and roll it into thunder, until the naked hills seem to rock to the measures of the song.

So must we listen to the winter winds, to the whistle of the soaring hawk, to the cry of the trailing hounds.

I have had more than one hunter grip me excitedly, and with almost a command bid me hear the music of the baying pack. There are hollow halls in the swamps that lie to the east and north and west of me, that catch up the cry of the fox hounds, that blend it, mellow it, round it, and roll it, rising and falling over the meadows these autumn nights in great globes of sound, as pure and sweet as the pearly notes of the wood thrush rolling around their silver basin in the summer dusk.

It is a different kind of music when the pack breaks into the open on the warm trail: a chorus then of individual tongues singing the ecstasy of pursuit. My blood leaps; the natural primitive wild thing of muscle and nerve and instinct within me slips its leash, and on past with the pack it drives, the scent of the trail single and sweet in its nostrils, a very fire in its blood, motion, motion, motion in its bounding muscles, and in its being a mighty music, spheric and immortal, a carol, chant and pæan, nature's "unjarred chime,"—

> The fair music that all creatures made
> To their great Lord, whose love their motions swayed
> In perfect diapason, whilst they stood
> In first obedience, and their state of good.

But what about the fox and his share in this gloria? It is a solemn music to him, certainly, loping wearily on ahead; but what part has he in the chorus? No part, perhaps, unless we grimly call him its conductor. But the point is the chorus, that it never ceases, the hounds at this moment, not the fox, in the leading rôle.

"But the chorus ceases for me," you say. "My heart is with the poor fox." So is mine, and mine is with the dogs too. Many a night I have bayed

with the pack, and as often, oftener, I think, I have loped and dodged and doubled with the fox, pitting limb against limb, lung against lung, wit against wit, and always escaping. More than once, in the warm moonlight of the early fall, I have led them on and on, spurring their lagging muscles with a sight of my brush, on and on, through the moonlit night, through the day, on into the moon again, and on until — only the stir of my own footsteps has followed me. Then doubling once more, creeping back a little upon my track, I have looked at my pursuers, silent and stiff upon the trail, and, ere the echo of their cry has died away, I have caught up the chorus and carried it single-throated through the wheeling singing spheres.

There is more of fact than of fancy to this. That a fox ever purposely ran a dog to death, would be hard to prove; but that the dogs run themselves to death in a single extended chase after a single fox is a common occurrence here in the woods about the farm. Occasionally the fox may be overtaken by the hounds; seldom, however, except in the case of a very young one or of a stranger, unacquainted with the lay of the land,

driven into the rough country here by an unusual combination of circumstances.

I have been both fox and hound; I have run the race too often not to know that both enjoy it at times, fox as much as hound. Some weeks ago the dogs carried a young fox around and around the farm, hunting him here, there, everywhere, as if in a game of hide-and-seek. An old fox would have led them on a long coursing run across the range. It was early fall and warm, so that at dusk the dogs were caught and taken off the trail. The fox soon sauntered up through the mowing field behind the barn, came out upon the bare knoll near the house, and sat there in the moonlight yapping down at Rex and Dewy, the house dogs in the two farms below. Rex is a Scotch collie, Dewy a dreadful mix of dog-dregs. He had been tail-ender in the pack for a while during the afternoon. Both dogs answered back at the young fox. But he could not egg them on. Rex was too fat, Dewy had had enough; not so the young fox. It had been fun. He wanted more. "Come on, Dewy!" he cried. "Come on, Rex, play tag again. You 're still 'it.'"

I was at work with my chickens one day when

the fox broke from cover in the tall woods, struck the old wagon road along the ridge, and came at a gallop down behind the hencoops, with five hounds not a minute behind. They passed with a crash and were gone — up over the ridge and down into the east swamp. Soon I noticed that the pack had broken, deploying in every direction, beating the ground over and over. Reynard had given them the slip, on the ridge-side, evidently, for there were no cries from below in the swamp.

The noon whistles blew, and leaving my work I went down to re-stake my cow in the meadow. I had just drawn her chain-pin when down the road through the orchard behind me came the fox, hopping high up and down, his neck stretched, his eye peeled for poultry. Spying a white hen of my neighbor's, he made for her, clear to the barnyard wall. Then, hopping higher for a better view, he sighted another hen in the front yard, skipped in gayly through the fence, seized her, loped across the road, and away up the birch-grown hills beyond.

The dogs had been at his very heels ten minutes before. He had fooled them. He had done

it again and again. They were even now yelping at the end of the baffling trail behind the ridge. Let them yelp. It is a kind and convenient habit of dogs, this yelping, one can tell so exactly where they are. Meantime one can take a turn for one's self at the chase, get a bite of chicken, a drink of water, a wink or two of rest, and when the yelping gets warm again, one is quite ready to pick up one's heels and lead the pack another merry dance. The fox is almost a humorist.

This is the way the races are all run off. Now and then they may end tragically. A fox cannot reckon on the hunter with a gun. Only dogs entered into the account when the balance in the scheme of things was struck for the fox. But, mortal finish or no, the spirit of the chase is neither rage nor terror, but the excitement of a matched game, the ecstasy of pursuit for the hound, the passion of escape for the fox, without fury or fear — except for the instant at the start and at the finish — when it is a finish.

This is the spirit of the chase — of the race, more truly, for it is always a race, where the stake is not life and death, as we conceive of life and death, but rather the joy of being. The hound

cares as little for his own life as for the life he is hunting. It is the race, instead; it is the moment of crowded, complete, supreme existence for him — "glory" we call it when men run it off together. Death, and the fear of death, are inconceivable to the animal mind. Only enemies exist in the world out of doors, only hounds, foxes, hawks — they, and their scents, their sounds and shadows; and not fear, but readiness only. The level of wild life, of the soul of all nature, is a great serenity. It is seldom lowered, but often raised to a higher level, intenser, faster, more exultant.

The serrate pines on my horizon are not the pickets of a great pen. My fields and swamps and ponds are not one wide battlefield, as if the only work of my wild neighbors were bloody war, and the whole of their existence a reign of terror. This is a universe of law and order and marvelous balance; conditions these of life, of normal, peaceful, joyous life. Life and not death is the law, joy and not fear is the spirit, is the frame of all that breathes, of very matter itself.

> And ever at the loom of Birth
> The Mighty Mother weaves and sings;

She weaves — fresh robes for mangled earth;
She sings — fresh hopes for desperate things.

"For the rest," says Hathi, most unscientific of elephants, in the most impossible of Jungle Stories, "for the rest, Fear walks up and down the Jungle by day and by night. . . . And only when there is one great Fear over all, as there is now, can we of the Jungle lay aside our little fears and meet together in one place as we do now."

Now, the law of the Indian Jungle is as old and as true as the sky, and just as widespread and as all-encompassing. It is the identical law of my New England pastures. It obtains here as it holds far away yonder. The trouble is all with Hathi. Hathi has lived so long in a British camp, has seen so few men but British soldiers, and has felt so little law but British military law in India, that very naturally Hathi gets the military law and the Jungle law mixed up.

Now these are the Laws of the Jungle, and many and mighty are they;
But the head and the hoof of the Law, and the haunch and the hump is — Obey!

else one of the little fears, or the BIG FEAR, will get you!

But this is the Law of the Camp, and as beautifully untrue of the Jungle, and of my woods and pastures, as Hathi's account of how, before Fear came, the First of the Tigers ate grass. Still, Nebuchadnezzar ate grass, and he also grew eagles' feathers upon his body. Perhaps the First of the Tigers had feathers instead of fur, though Hathi is silent as to that, saying only that the First of the Tigers had no stripes. It might not harm us to remember, however, that nowadays — as was true in the days of the Sabretooth tiger (he is a fossil) — tigers eat grass only when they feel very bad, or when they find a bunch of catnip. The wild animals that Hathi knew are more marvelous than the Wild Animals I Have Known, but Hathi's knowledge of Jungle law is all stuff and nonsense.

There is no ogre, Fear, no command, Obey, but the widest kind of a personal permit to live — joyously, abundantly, intensely, frugally at times, painfully at times, and always with large liberty; until, suddenly, the time comes to Let Live, when death is almost sure to be instant, with little pain, and less fear.

But am I not generalizing from the single case

of the fox and hounds? or at most from two cases — the hen and the hawk? And are not these cases far from typical? Fox and hound are unusually matched, both of them are canines, and so closely related that the dog has been known to let a she-fox go unharmed at the end of an exciting hunt. Suppose the fox were a defenseless rabbit, what of fear and terror then?

Ask any one who has shot in the rabbity fields of southern New Jersey. The rabbit seldom runs in blind terror. He is soft-eyed, and timid, and as gentle as a pigeon, but he is not defenseless. A nobler set of legs was never bestowed by nature than the little cotton-tail's. They are as wings compared with the deformities that bear up the ordinary rabbit hound. With winged legs, protecting color, a clear map of the country in his head, — its stumps, rail-piles, cat-brier tangles, and narrow rabbit-roads, — with all this as a handicap, Bunny may well run his usual cool and winning race. The balance is just as even, the chances quite as good, and the contest as interesting, to him as to Reynard.

I have seen a rabbit squat close in his form and let a hound pass yelping within a few feet of

him, but as ready as a hair-trigger should he be discovered. I have seen him leap for his life as the dog sighted him, and bounding like a ball across the stubble, disappear in the woods, the hound within two jumps of his flashing tail. I have waited at the end of the wood-road for the runners to come back, down the home-stretch, for the finish. On they go for a quarter, or perhaps half a mile, through the woods, the baying of the hound faint and intermittent in the distance, then quite lost. No, there it is again, louder now. They have turned the course. I wait.

The quiet life of the woods is undisturbed, for the voice of the hound is only an echo, not unlike the far-off tolling of a slow-swinging bell. The leaves stir as a wood-mouse scurries from his stump; an acorn rattles down; then in the winding wood-road I hear the *pit-pat*, *pit-pat*, of soft furry feet, and there at the bend is the rabbit. He stops, rises high up on his haunches, and listens. He drops again upon all fours, scratches himself behind the ear, reaches over the cart-rut for a nip of sassafras, hops a little nearer, and throws his big ears forward in quick alarm, for he sees me, and, as if something had exploded under him, he

kicks into the air and is off, — leaving a pretty tangle for the dog to unravel later on, by this mighty jump to the side.

My children and the man were witnesses recently of an exciting, and, for this section of Massachusetts, a novel race, which, but for them, must certainly have ended fatally. The boys had picked up the morning fall of chestnuts, and were coming through the wood-lot where the man was chopping, when down the hillside toward them rushed a little chipmunk, his teeth a-chatter with terror, for close behind him, with the easy wavy motion of a shadow, glided a dark brown animal, which the man took on the instant for a mink, but which must have been a large weasel or a pine marten. When almost at the feet of the boys, and about to be seized by the marten, the squeaking chipmunk ran up a tree. Up glided the marten, up for twenty feet. Then the chipmunk jumped. It was a fearfully close call. The marten did not dare to jump, but turned and started down, when the man intercepted him with a stick. Around and around the tree he dodged, growling and snarling and avoiding the stick, not a bit abashed, stubbornly holding his own, until forced

to seek refuge among the branches. Meanwhile the terrified chipmunk had recovered his nerve and sat quietly watching the sudden turn of affairs from a near-by stump.

I climbed into the cupola of the barn this morning, as I frequently do throughout the winter, and brought down a dazed junco that was beating his life out up there against the window-panes. He lay on his back in my open hand, either feigning death or really powerless with fear. His eyes were closed, his whole tiny body throbbing convulsively with his throbbing heart. Taking him to the door, I turned him over and gave him a gentle toss. Instantly his wings flashed, they zigzagged him for a yard or two, then bore him swiftly around the corner of the house and dropped him in the midst of his fellows, where they were feeding upon the lawn. He shaped himself up a little and fell to picking with the others.

From a state of collapse the laws of his being had brought the bird into normal behavior as quickly and completely as the collapsed rubber ball is rounded by the laws of its being. The memory of the fright seems to have been an im-

pression exactly like the dent in the rubber ball — as if it had never been.

Yet the analogy only half holds. Memories of the most tenacious kind the animals surely have; but little or no voluntary, unaided power to use them. Memory is largely a mechanical, a crank process with the animals, a kind of magic-lantern show, where the concrete slide is necessary for the picture on the screen; else the past as the future hangs a blank. The dog will sometimes seem to cherish a grudge; so will the elephant. Some one injures or wrongs him, and the huge beast harbors the memory, broods it, and waits his opportunity for revenge. Yet the records of these cases usually show the creature to be living with the object of his hatred — keeper or animal — and that his memory goes no further back than the present moment, than the sight of the enemy; memory always taking an immediate, concrete shape.

At my railroad station I frequently see a yoke of great sleepy, bald-faced oxen, that look as much alike as two blackbirds. Their driver knows them apart; but as they stand there bound to one another by the heavy bar across their foreheads, it

would puzzle anybody else to tell Buck from Berry. But not if he approach them wearing an overcoat. At sight of me in an overcoat the off ox will snort and back and thresh about in terror, twisting the head of his yoke-fellow, nearly breaking his neck, and trampling him miserably. But the nigh ox is used to it. He chews and blinks away placidly, keeps his feet the best he can, and does n't try to understand at all why great-coats should so frighten his cud-chewing brother. I will drop off my coat and go up immediately to smooth the muzzles of both oxen, blinking sleepily while the lumber is being loaded on.

Years ago, the driver told me, the off ox was badly frightened by a big woolly coat, the sight or smell of which suggested to the creature some natural enemy, a panther, perhaps, or a bear. The memory remained, but beyond recall except in the presence of its first cause, the great-coat.

To us, and momentarily to the lower animals, no doubt, there is a monstrous, a desperate aspect to nature — night and drouth and cold, the lightning, the hurricane, the earthquake: phases of nature that to the scientific mind are often appall-

ing, and to the unthinking and superstitious are usually sinister, cruel, personal, leading to much dark talk of banshees and of the mysteries of Providence — as if there were still necessity to justify the ways of God to man! We are clutched by these terrors even as the junco was clutched in my goblin hand. When the mighty fingers open, we zigzag, dazed from the danger; but fall to planning, before the tremors of the earth have ceased, how we can build a greater and finer city on the ruins of the old. Upon the crumbled heap of the second Messina the third will rise, and upon that the fourth, unless the quaking site is forever swallowed by the sea. Terror can kill the living, but it cannot hinder them from forgetting, or prevent them from hoping, or, for more than an instant, stop them from doing. Such is the law of being — the law of the Jungle, of Heaven, of my pastures, of myself, and of the little junco. The light of the sun may burn out, motion may cease, matter vanish away, and life come to an end; but so long as life continues it must continue to assert itself, to obey the law of being — to multiply and replenish the earth, and rejoice.

Life, like Law and Matter, is all of one piece.

The horse in my stable, the robin, the toad, the beetle, the vine in my garden, the garden itself, and I together with them all, come out of the same divine dust; we all breathe the same divine breath; we have our beings under the same divine law; only they do not know that the law, the breath, and the dust are divine. If I do know, and yet can so readily forget such knowledge, can so hardly cease from being, can so eternally find the purpose, the hope, the joy of life within me, how soon for them, my lowly fellow mortals, must vanish all sight of fear, all memory of pain! And how abiding with them, how compelling, the necessity to live! And in their unquestioning obedience what joy!

The face of the fields is as changeful as the face of a child. Every passing wind, every shifting cloud, every calling bird, every baying hound, every shape, shadow, fragrance, sound, and tremor, are so many emotions reflected there. But if time and experience and pain come, they pass utterly away; for the face of the fields does not grow old or wise or seamed with pain. It is always the face of a child, — asleep in winter, awake in summer, — a face of life and health always, if we

will but see what pushes the falling leaves off, what lies in slumber under the covers of the snow; if we will but feel the strength of the north wind, and the wild fierce joy of the fox and hound as they course the turning, tangling paths of the woodlands in their race with one another against the record set by Life.

II

TURTLE EGGS FOR AGASSIZ

TURTLE EGGS FOR AGASSIZ

IT is one of the wonders of the world that so few books are written. With every human being a possible book, and with many a human being capable of becoming more books than the world could contain, is it not amazing that the books of men are so few? And so stupid!

I took down, recently, from the shelves of a great public library, the four volumes of Agassiz's "Contributions to the Natural History of the United States." I doubt if anybody but the charwoman, with her duster, had touched those volumes for twenty-five years. They are an excessively learned, a monumental, an epoch-making work, the fruit of vast and heroic labors, with colored plates on stone, showing the turtles of the United States, and their embryology. The work was published more than half a century ago (by subscription); but it looked old beyond its years — massive, heavy, weathered, as if dug from the rocks. It was difficult to feel that Agassiz could have written it

— could have built it, grown it, for the laminated pile had required for its growth the patience and painstaking care of a process of nature, as if it were a kind of printed coral reef. Agassiz do this? The big, human, magnetic man at work upon these pages of capital letters, Roman figures, brackets, and parentheses in explanation of the pages of diagrams and plates! I turned away with a sigh from the weary learning, to read the preface.

When a great man writes a great book he usually flings a preface after it, and thereby saves it, sometimes, from oblivion. Whether so or not, the best things in most books are their prefaces. It was not, however, the quality of the preface to these great volumes that interested me, but rather the wicked waste of durable book-material that went to its making. Reading down through the catalogue of human names and of thanks for help received, I came to a sentence beginning: —

"In New England I have myself collected largely; but I have also received valuable contributions from the late Rev. Zadoc Thompson of Burlington; . . . from Mr. D. Henry Thoreau of Concord; . . . and from Mr. J. W. P. Jenks

of Middleboro'." And then it hastens on with the thanks in order to get to the turtles, as if turtles were the one and only thing of real importance in all the world.

Turtles no doubt are important, extremely important, embryologically, as part of our genealogical tree; but they are away down among the roots of the tree as compared with the late Rev. Zadoc Thompson of Burlington. I happen to know nothing about the Rev. Zadoc, but to me he looks very interesting. Indeed, any reverend gentleman of his name and day who would catch turtles for Agassiz must have been interesting. And as for D. Henry Thoreau, we know he was interesting. The rarest wood-turtle in the United States was not so rare a specimen as this gentleman of Walden Woods and Concord. We are glad even for this line in the preface about him; glad to know that he tried, in this untranscendental way, to serve his day and generation. If Agassiz had only put a chapter in his turtle book about it! But this is the material he wasted, this and more of the same human sort; for the "Mr. J. W. P. Jenks of Middleboro'" (at the end of the quotation) was, some years later, an old col-

lege professor of mine, who told me a few of the particulars of his turtle contributions, particulars which Agassiz should have found a place for in his big book. The preface, in another paragraph, says merely that this gentleman sent turtles to Cambridge by the thousands — brief and scanty recognition! For that is not the only thing this gentleman did. On one occasion he sent, not turtles, but turtle *eggs* to Cambridge — *brought* them, I should say; and all there is to show for it, so far as I could discover, is a sectional drawing of a bit of the mesoblastic layer of one of the eggs!

Of course, Agassiz wanted to make that mesoblastic drawing, or some other equally important drawing, and had to have the fresh turtle egg to draw it from. He had to have it, and he got it. A great man, when he wants a certain turtle egg, at a certain time, always gets it, for he gets some one else to get it. I am glad he got it. But what makes me sad and impatient is that he did not think it worth while to tell about the getting of it, and so made merely a learned turtle book of what might have been an exceedingly interesting human book.

It would seem, naturally, that there could be nothing unusual or interesting about the getting of turtle eggs when you want them. Nothing at all, if you should chance to want the eggs as you chance to find them. So with anything else, — good copper stock, for instance, if you should chance to want it, and should chance to be along when they chance to be giving it away. But if you want copper stock, say of C & H quality, *when* you want it, and are bound to have it, then you must command more than a college professor's salary. And likewise, precisely, when it is turtle eggs that you are bound to have.

Agassiz wanted those turtle eggs when he wanted them — not a minute over three hours from the minute they were laid. Yet even that does not seem exacting, hardly more difficult than the getting of hen eggs only three hours old. Just so, provided the professor could have had his private turtle-coop in Harvard Yard; and provided he could have made his turtles lay. But turtles will not respond, like hens, to meat-scraps and the warm mash. The professor's problem was not to get from a mud turtle's nest in the back yard to the table in the laboratory; but to get

from the laboratory in Cambridge to some pond when the turtles were laying, and back to the laboratory within the limited time. And this, in the days of Darius Green, might have called for nice and discriminating work — as it did.

Agassiz had been engaged for a long time upon his "Contributions." He had brought the great work nearly to a finish. It was, indeed, finished but for one small yet very important bit of observation: he had carried the turtle egg through every stage of its development with the single exception of one — the very earliest — that stage of first cleavages, when the cell begins to segment, immediately upon its being laid. That beginning stage had brought the "Contributions" to a halt. To get eggs that were fresh enough to show the incubation at this period had been impossible.

There were several ways that Agassiz might have proceeded: he might have got a leave of absence for the spring term, taken his laboratory to some pond inhabited by turtles, and there camped until he should catch the reptile digging out her nest. But there were difficulties in all of that — as those who are college professors and

naturalists know. As this was quite out of the question, he did the easiest thing — asked Mr. Jenks of Middleboro' to get him the eggs. Mr. Jenks got them. Agassiz knew all about his getting of them; and I say the strange and irritating thing is, that Agassiz did not think it worth while to tell us about it, at least in the preface to his monumental work.

It was many years later that Mr. Jenks, then a gray-haired college professor, told me how he got those eggs to Agassiz.

"I was principal of an academy, during my younger years," he began, "and was busy one day with my classes, when a large man suddenly filled the doorway of the room, smiled to the four corners of the room, and called out with a big, quick voice that he was Professor Agassiz.

"Of course he was. I knew it, even before he had had time to shout it to me across the room.

"Would I get him some turtle eggs? he called. Yes, I would. And would I get them to Cambridge within three hours from the time they were laid? Yes, I would. And I did. And it was worth the doing. But I did it only once.

"When I promised Agassiz those eggs I knew

where I was going to get them. I had got turtle eggs there before — at a particular patch of sandy shore along a pond, a few miles distant from the academy.

"Three hours was the limit. From my railroad station to Boston was thirty-five miles; from the pond to the station was perhaps three or four miles; from Boston to Cambridge we called about three miles. Forty miles in round numbers! We figured it all out before he returned, and got the trip down to two hours, — record time: driving from the pond to the station; from the station by express train to Boston; from Boston by cab to Cambridge. This left an easy hour for accidents and delays.

"Cab and car and carriage we reckoned into our time-table; but what we did n't figure on was the turtle." And he paused abruptly.

"Young man," he went on, his shaggy brows and spectacles hardly hiding the twinkle in the eyes that were bent severely upon me, "young man, when *you* go after turtle eggs, take into account the turtle. No! no! that 's bad advice. Youth never reckons on the turtle — and youth seldom ought to. Only old age does that; and old

age would never have got those turtle eggs to Agassiz.

"It was in the early spring that Agassiz came to the academy, long before there was any likelihood of the turtles laying. But I was eager for the quest, and so fearful of failure, that I started out to watch at the pond fully two weeks ahead of the time that the turtles might be expected to lay. I remember the date clearly: it was May 14.

"A little before dawn — along near three o'clock — I would drive over to the pond, hitch my horse near by, settle myself quietly among some thick cedars close to the sandy shore, and there I would wait, my kettle of sand ready, my eye covering the whole sleeping pond. Here among the cedars I would eat my breakfast, and then get back in good season to open the academy for the morning session.

"And so the watch began.

"I soon came to know individually the dozen or more turtles that kept to my side of the pond. Shortly after the cold mist would lift and melt away, they would stick up their heads through the quiet water; and as the sun slanted down over the ragged rim of treetops, the slow things would

float into the warm, lighted spots, or crawl out and doze comfortably on the hummocks and snags.

"What fragrant mornings those were! How fresh and new and unbreathed! The pond odors, the woods odors, the odors of the ploughed fields — of water-lily, and wild grape, and the dew-laid soil! I can taste them yet, and hear them yet — the still, large sounds of the waking day — the pickerel breaking the quiet with his swirl; the kingfisher dropping anchor; the stir of feet and wings among the trees. And then the thought of the great book being held up for me! Those were rare mornings!

"But there began to be a good many of them, for the turtles showed no desire to lay. They sprawled in the sun, and never one came out upon the sand as if she intended to help on the great professor's book. The embryology of her eggs was of small concern to her; her Contribution to the Natural History of the United States could wait.

"And it did wait. I began my watch on the 14th of May; June 1st found me still among the cedars, still waiting, as I had waited every

morning, Sundays and rainy days alike. June 1st was a perfect morning, but every turtle slid out upon her log, as if egg-laying might be a matter strictly of next year.

"I began to grow uneasy, — not impatient yet, for a naturalist learns his lesson of patience early, and for all his years; but I began to fear lest, by some subtle sense, my presence might somehow be known to the creatures; that they might have gone to some other place to lay, while I was away at the schoolroom.

"I watched on to the end of the first week, on to the end of the second week in June, seeing the mists rise and vanish every morning, and along with them vanish, more and more, the poetry of my early morning vigil. Poetry and rheumatism cannot long dwell together in the same clump of cedars, and I had begun to feel the rheumatism. A month of morning mists wrapping me around had at last soaked through to my bones. But Agassiz was waiting, and the world was waiting, for those turtle eggs; and I would wait. It was all I could do, for there is no use bringing a china nest-egg to a turtle; she is not open to any such delicate suggestion.

"Then came the mid-June Sunday morning, with dawn breaking a little after three: a warm, wide-awake dawn, with the level mist lifted from the level surface of the pond a full hour higher than I had seen it any morning before.

"This was the day. I knew it. I have heard persons say that they can hear the grass grow; that they know by some extra sense when danger is nigh. That we have these extra senses I fully believe, and I believe they can be sharpened by cultivation. For a month I had been brooding over this pond, and now I knew. I felt a stirring of the pulse of things that the cold-hearted turtles could no more escape than could the clods and I.

"Leaving my horse unhitched, as if he, too, understood, I slipped eagerly into my covert for a look at the pond. As I did so, a large pickerel ploughed a furrow out through the spatter-docks, and in his wake rose the head of an enormous turtle. Swinging slowly around, the creature headed straight for the shore, and without a pause scrambled out on the sand.

"She was about the size of a big scoop-shovel; but that was not what excited me, so much as her

manner, and the gait at which she moved; for there was method in it and fixed purpose. On she came, shuffling over the sand toward the higher open fields, with a hurried, determined see-saw that was taking her somewhere in particular, and that was bound to get her there on time.

"I held my breath. Had she been a dinosaurian making Mesozoic footprints, I could not have been more fearful. For footprints in the Mesozoic mud, or in the sands of time, were as nothing to me when compared with fresh turtle eggs in the sands of this pond.

"But over the strip of sand, without a stop, she paddled, and up a narrow cow-path into the high grass along a fence. Then up the narrow cow-path, on all fours, just like another turtle, I paddled, and into the high wet grass along the fence.

"I kept well within sound of her, for she moved recklessly, leaving a trail of flattened grass a foot and a half wide. I wanted to stand up, — and I don't believe I could have turned her back with a rail, — but I was afraid if she saw me that she might return indefinitely to the pond; so on I went, flat to the ground, squeezing through the lower rails of the fence, as if the field beyond were

a melon-patch. It was nothing of the kind, only a wild, uncomfortable pasture, full of dewberry vines, and very discouraging. They were excessively wet vines and briery. I pulled my coat-sleeves as far over my fists as I could get them, and with the tin pail of sand swinging from between my teeth to avoid noise, I stumped fiercely but silently on after the turtle.

"She was laying her course, I thought, straight down the length of this dreadful pasture, when, not far from the fence, she suddenly hove to, warped herself short about, and came back, barely clearing me, at a clip that was thrilling. I warped about, too, and in her wake bore down across the corner of the pasture, across the powdery public road, and on to a fence along a field of young corn.

"I was somewhat wet by this time, but not so wet as I had been before wallowing through the deep dry dust of the road. Hurrying up behind a large tree by the fence, I peered down the corn-rows and saw the turtle stop, and begin to paw about in the loose soft soil. She was going to lay!

"I held on to the tree and watched, as she tried this place, and that place, and the other place —

the eternally feminine! — But *the* place, evidently, was hard to find. What could a female turtle do with a whole field of possible nests to choose from? Then at last she found it, and whirling about, she backed quickly at it, and, tail first, began to bury herself before my staring eyes.

"Those were not the supreme moments of my life; perhaps those moments came later that day; but those certainly were among the slowest, most dreadfully mixed of moments that I ever experienced. They were hours long. There she was, her shell just showing, like some old hulk in the sand along shore. And how long would she stay there? and how should I know if she had laid an egg?

"I could still wait. And so I waited, when, over the freshly awakened fields, floated four mellow strokes from the distant town clock.

"Four o'clock! Why, there was no train until seven! No train for three hours! The eggs would spoil! Then with a rush it came over me that this was Sunday morning, and there was no regular seven o'clock train, — none till after nine.

"I think I should have fainted had not the turtle just then begun crawling off. I was weak

and dizzy; but there, there in the sand, were the eggs! and Agassiz! and the great book! And I cleared the fence, and the forty miles that lay between me and Cambridge, at a single jump. He should have them, trains or no. Those eggs should go to Agassiz by seven o'clock, if I had to gallop every mile of the way. Forty miles! Any horse could cover it in three hours, if he had to; and upsetting the astonished turtle, I scooped out her round white eggs.

"On a bed of sand in the bottom of the pail I laid them, with what care my trembling fingers allowed; filled in between them with more sand; so with another layer to the rim; and covering all smoothly with more sand, I ran back for my horse.

"That horse knew, as well as I, that the turtles had laid, and that he was to get those eggs to Agassiz. He turned out of that field into the road on two wheels, a thing he had not done for twenty years, doubling me up before the dashboard, the pail of eggs miraculously lodged between my knees.

"I let him out. If only he could keep this pace all the way to Cambridge! or even halfway

there; and I would have time to finish the trip on foot. I shouted him on, holding to the dasher with one hand, the pail of eggs with the other, not daring to get off my knees, though the bang on them, as we pounded down the wood-road, was terrific. But nothing must happen to the eggs; they must not be jarred, or even turned over in the sand before they came to Agassiz.

"In order to get out on the pike it was necessary to drive back away from Boston toward the town. We had nearly covered the distance, and were rounding a turn from the woods into the open fields, when, ahead of me, at the station it seemed, I heard the quick sharp whistle of a locomotive.

"What did it mean? Then followed the *puff, puff, puff*, of a starting train. But what train? Which way going? And jumping to my feet for a longer view, I pulled into a side road, that paralleled the track, and headed hard for the station.

"We reeled along. The station was still out of sight, but from behind the bushes that shut it from view, rose the smoke of a moving engine. It was perhaps a mile away, but we were approaching,

head on, and topping a little hill I swept down upon a freight train, the black smoke pouring from the stack, as the mighty creature got itself together for its swift run down the rails.

"My horse was on the gallop, going with the track, and straight toward the coming train. The sight of it almost maddened me — the bare thought of it, on the road to Boston! On I went; on it came, a half — a quarter of a mile between us, when suddenly my road shot out along an unfenced field with only a level stretch of sod between me and the engine.

"With a pull that lifted the horse from his feet, I swung him into the field and sent him straight as an arrow for the track. That train should carry me and my eggs to Boston!

"The engineer pulled the rope. He saw me standing up in the rig, saw my hat blow off, saw me wave my arms, saw the tin pail swing in my teeth, and he jerked out a succession of sharp halts! But it was he who should halt, not I; and on we went, the horse with a flounder landing the carriage on top of the track.

"The train was already grinding to a stop; but before it was near a standstill, I had backed off

the track, jumped out, and, running down the rails with the astonished engineers gaping at me, swung aboard the cab.

"They offered no resistance; they had n't had time. Nor did they have the disposition, for I looked strange, not to say dangerous. Hatless, dew-soaked, smeared with yellow mud, and holding, as if it were a baby or a bomb, a little tin pail of sand.

"'Crazy,' the fireman muttered, looking to the engineer for his cue.

"I had been crazy, perhaps, but I was not crazy now.

"'Throw her wide open,' I commanded. 'Wide open! These are fresh turtle eggs for Professor Agassiz of Cambridge. He must have them before breakfast.'

"Then they knew I was crazy, and evidently thinking it best to humor me, threw the throttle wide open, and away we went.

"I kissed my hand to the horse, grazing unconcernedly in the open field, and gave a smile to my crew. That was all I could give them, and hold myself and the eggs together. But the smile was enough. And they smiled through their smut

at me, though one of them held fast to his shovel, while the other kept his hand upon a big ugly wrench. Neither of them spoke to me, but above the roar of the swaying engine I caught enough of their broken talk to understand that they were driving under a full head of steam, with the intention of handing me over to the Boston police, as perhaps the safest way of disposing of me.

"I was only afraid that they would try it at the next station. But that station whizzed past without a bit of slack, and the next, and the next; when it came over me that this was the through freight, which should have passed in the night, and was making up lost time.

"Only the fear of the shovel and the wrench kept me from shaking hands with both men at this discovery. But I beamed at them; and they at me. I was enjoying it. The unwonted jar beneath my feet was wrinkling my diaphragm with spasms of delight. And the fireman beamed at the engineer, with a look that said, 'See the lunatic grin; he likes it!'

"He did like it. How the iron wheels sang to me as they took the rails! How the rushing wind in my ears sang to me! From my stand on the

fireman's side of the cab I could catch a glimpse of the track just ahead of the engine, where the ties seemed to leap into the throat of the mile-devouring monster. The joy of it! of seeing space swallowed by the mile!

"I shifted the eggs from hand to hand and thought of my horse, of Agassiz, of the great book, of my great luck, — luck, — luck, — until the multitudinous tongues of the thundering train were all chiming 'luck! luck! luck!' They knew! they understood! This beast of fire and tireless wheels was doing its best to get the eggs to Agassiz!

"We swung out past the Blue Hills, and yonder flashed the morning sun from the towering dome of the State House. I might have leaped from the cab and run the rest of the way on foot, had I not caught the eye of the engineer watching me narrowly. I was not in Boston yet, nor in Cambridge either. I was an escaped lunatic, who had held up a train, and forced it to carry me to Boston.

"Perhaps I had overdone the lunacy business. Suppose these two men should take it into their heads to turn me over to the police, whether I

would or no? I could never explain the case in time to get the eggs to Agassiz. I looked at my watch. There were still a few minutes left, in which I might explain to these men, who, all at once, had become my captors. But it was too late. Nothing could avail against my actions, my appearance, and my little pail of sand.

"I had not thought of my appearance before. Here I was, face and clothes caked with yellow mud, my hair wild and matted, my hat gone, and in my full-grown hands a tiny tin pail of sand, as if I had been digging all night with a tiny tin shovel on the shore! And thus to appear in the decent streets of Boston of a Sunday morning!

"I began to feel like a lunatic. The situation was serious, or might be, and rather desperately funny at its best. I must in some way have shown my new fears, for both men watched me more sharply.

"Suddenly, as we were nearing the outer freight-yard, the train slowed down and came to a stop. I was ready to jump, but I had no chance. They had nothing to do, apparently, but to guard me. I looked at my watch again. What time we

had made! It was only six o'clock, with a whole hour to get to Cambridge.

"But I did n't like this delay. Five minutes — ten — went by.

"'Gentlemen,' I began, but was cut short by an express train coming past. We were moving again, on — into a siding; on — on to the main track; and on with a bump and a crash and a succession of crashes, running the length of the train; on at a turtle's pace, but on, — when the fireman, quickly jumping for the bell-rope, left the way to the step free, and — the chance had come!

"I never touched the step, but landed in the soft sand at the side of the track, and made a line for the yard fence.

"There was no hue or cry. I glanced over my shoulder to see if they were after me. Evidently their hands were full, and they did n't know I had gone.

"But I had gone; and was ready to drop over the high board-fence, when it occurred to me that I might drop into a policeman's arms. Hanging my pail in a splint on top of a post, I peered cautiously over — a very wise thing to do before

you jump a high board-fence. There, crossing the open square toward the station, was a big burly fellow with a club — looking for me.

"I flattened for a moment, when some one in the yard yelled at me. I preferred the policeman, and grabbing my pail I slid over to the street. The policeman moved on past the corner of the station out of sight. The square was free, and yonder stood a cab!

"Time was flying now. Here was the last lap. The cabman saw me coming, and squared away. I waved a paper dollar at him, but he only stared the more. A dollar can cover a good deal, but I was too much for one dollar. I pulled out another, thrust them both at him, and dodged into the cab, calling, 'Cambridge!'

"He would have taken me straight to the police station, had I not said, 'Harvard College. Professor Agassiz's house! I've got eggs for Agassiz'; and pushed another dollar up at him through the hole.

"It was nearly half-past six.

"'Let him go!' I ordered. 'Here's another dollar if you make Agassiz's house in twenty minutes. Let him out. Never mind the police!'

"He evidently knew the police, or there were few around at that time on a Sunday morning. We went down the sleeping streets, as I had gone down the wood-roads from the pond two hours before, but with the rattle and crash now of a fire brigade. Whirling a corner into Cambridge Street, we took the bridge at a gallop, the driver shouting out something in Hibernian to a pair of waving arms and a belt and brass buttons.

"Across the bridge with a rattle and jolt that put the eggs in jeopardy, and on over the cobblestones, we went. Half-standing, to lessen the jar, I held the pail in one hand and held myself in the other, not daring to let go even to look at my watch.

"But I was afraid to look at the watch. I was afraid to see how near to seven o'clock it might be. The sweat was dropping from my nose, so close was I running to the limit of my time.

"Suddenly there was a lurch, and I dove forward, ramming my head into the front of the cab, coming up with a rebound that landed me across the small of my back on the seat, and sent half of my pail of eggs helter-skelter over the floor.

"We had stopped. Here was Agassiz's house; and not taking time to pick up the scattered eggs, I tumbled out, and pounded at the door.

"No one was astir in the house. But I would stir them. And I did. Right in the midst of the racket the door opened. It was the maid.

"'Agassiz,' I gasped, 'I want Professor Agassiz, quick!' And I pushed by her into the hall.

"'Go 'way, sir. I'll call the police. Professor Agassiz is in bed. Go 'way, sir.'

"'Call him — Agassiz — instantly, or I'll call him myself!'

"But I didn't; for just then a door overhead was flung open, a white-robed figure appeared on the dim landing above, and a quick loud voice called excitedly, —

"'Let him in! Let him in! I know him. He has my turtle eggs!'

"And the apparition, slipperless, and clad in anything but an academic gown, came sailing down the stairs.

"The maid fled. The great man, his arms extended, laid hold of me with both hands, and dragging me and my precious pail into his study, with a swift, clean stroke laid open one of the

eggs, as the watch in my trembling hands ticked its way to seven — as if nothing unusual were happening to the history of the world."

"You were in time then?" I said.

"To the tick. There stands my copy of the great book. I am proud of the humble part I had in it."

III

THE EDGE OF NIGHT

THE EDGE OF NIGHT

EYOND the meadow, nearly half a mile away, yet in sight from my window, stands an apple tree, the last of an ancient line that once marked the boundary between the upper and lower pastures. For an apple tree it is unspeakably woeful, and bent, and hoary, and grizzled, with suckers from feet to crown. Unkempt and unesteemed, it attracts only the cattle for its shade, and gives to them alone its gnarly, bitter fruit.

But that old tree is hollow, trunk and limb; and if its apples are of Sodom, there is still no tree in the Garden of the Hesperides, none even in my own private Eden, carefully kept as they are, that is half as interesting — I had almost said, as useful. Among the trees of the Lord, an apple tree that bears good Baldwins or greenings or rambos comes first for usefulness; but when one has thirty-five of such trees, which the town has compelled one to trim and scrape and plas-

ter-up and petticoat against the grewsome gypsy moth, then those thirty-five are dull indeed, compared with the untrimmed, unscraped, unplastered, undressed old tramp yonder on the knoll, whose heart is still wide open to the birds and beasts — to every small traveler passing by who needs, perforce, a home, a hiding, or a harbor.

When I was a small boy everybody used to put up overnight at grandfather's — for grandmother's wit and buckwheat cakes, I think, which were known away down into Cape May County. It was so, too, with grandfather's wisdom and brooms. The old house sat in behind a grove of pin-oak and pine, a sheltered, sheltering spot, with a peddler's stall in the barn, a peddler's place at the table, a peddler's bed in the herby garret, a boundless, fathomless feather-bed, of a piece with the house and the hospitality. There were larger houses and newer, in the neighborhood; but no other house in all the region, not even the tavern, two miles farther down the Pike, was half as central, or as homelike, or as full of sweet and juicy gossip.

The old apple tree yonder between the woods

and the meadow is as central, as hospitable, and, if animals communicate with one another, just as full of neighborhood news as was grandfather's roof-tree.

Did I say none but the cattle seek its shade? Go over and watch. That old tree is no decrepit, deserted shack of a house. There is no door-plate, there is no christened letter-box outside the front fence, because the birds and beasts do not advertise their houses that way. But go over, say, toward evening, and sit quietly down outside. You will not wait long, for the doors will open that you may enter — enter into a home of the fields, and, a little way at least, into a life of the fields, for this old tree has a small dweller of some sort the year round.

If it is February or March you will be admitted by my owls. They take possession late in winter and occupy the tree, with some curious fellow tenants, until early summer. I can count upon these small screech-owls by February, — the forlorn month, the seasonless, hopeless, lifeless stretch of the year, but for its owls, its thaws, its lengthening days, its cackling pullets, its possibility of swallows, and its being the year's end.

At least the ancients called February the year's end, maintaining, with fine poetic sense, that the world was begun in March; and they were nearer the beginnings of things than we are.

But the owls come in February, and if they are not swallows with the spring, they, nevertheless, help winter with most seemly haste into an early grave. Yet across the faded February meadow the old apple tree stands empty and drear enough — until the shadows of the night begin to fall.

As the dusk comes down, I go to my window and watch. I cannot see him, the grim-beaked baron with his hooked talons, his ghostly wings, his night-seeing eyes; but I know that he has come to his window in the turret yonder on the darkening sky, and that he watches with me. I cannot see him swoop downward over the ditches, nor see him quarter the meadow, beating, dangling, dropping between the flattened tussocks; nor hear him, back on the silent shadows, slant upward again to his turret. Mine are human eyes, human ears. Even the quick-eared meadow-mouse did not hear.

But I have been belated and forced to cross

this wild night-land of his; and I have *felt* him pass — so near at times that he has stirred my hair, by the wind, dare I say, of his mysterious wings? At other times I have heard him. Often on the edge of night I have listened to his quavering, querulous cry from the elm-tops below me by the meadow. But oftener I have watched at the casement here in my castle wall.

Away yonder on the borders of night, dim and gloomy, looms his ancient keep. I wait. Soon on the deepened dusk spread his soft wings, out over the meadow he sails, up over my wooded height, over my moat, to my turret tall, as silent and unseen as the soul of a shadow, except he drift across the face of the full round moon, or with his weird cry cause the dreaming quiet to stir in its sleep and moan.

Yes, yes, but one must be pretty much of a child, with most of his childish things not yet put away, to get any such romance out of a rotten apple tree, plus a bunch of feathers no bigger than one's two fists. One must be pretty far removed from the real world, the live world that swings, no longer through the heavens, but at the distributing end of a news wire — pretty far removed

to spend one's precious time watching screech-owls.

And so one is, indeed, — sixteen miles removed by space, one whole day by post, one whole hour by engine and horse, one whole half-minute by the telephone in the back hall. Lost! cut off completely! hopelessly marooned!

I fear so. Perhaps I must admit that the watching of owls is for babes and sucklings, not for men with great work to do, that is, with money to make, news to get, office to hold, and clubs to address. For babes and sucklings, and, possibly, for those with a soul to save, yet I hasten to avow that the watching of owls is not religion; for I entirely agree with our Shelburne essayist when he finds, "in all this worship of nature," — by Traherne, Rousseau, Wordsworth, Thoreau, and those who seek the transfigured world of the woods, — "there is a strain of illusion which melts away at the touch of the greater realities . . . and there are evils against which its seduction is of no avail."

But let the illusion melt. Other worships have shown a strain of illusion at times, and against certain evils been of small avail. And let it be

admitted that calling regularly at an old apple tree is far short of a full man's work in the world, even when such calling falls outside of his shop or office-hours. For there are no such hours. The business of life allows no spare time any more. One cannot get rich nowadays in office-hours, nor become great, nor keep telegraphically informed, nor do his share of talking and listening. Everybody but the plumber and paper-hanger works overtime. How the earth keeps up a necessary amount of whirling in the old twenty-four-hour limit is more than we can understand. But she can't keep up the pace much longer. She must have an extra hour. And how to snatch it from the tail-end of eternity is the burning cosmological question.

And this is the burning question with regard to our individual whirling — How to add time, or, what amounts to exactly the same, How to increase the whirling.

There have been many hopeful answers. The whirl has been vastly accelerated. The fly-wheel of the old horse treadmill is now geared to an electric dynamo. But it is not enough; it is not the answer. And I despair of the answer—

of the perfect whirl, the perpetual, invisible, untimable.

Hence the apple tree, the owls, the illusions, the lost hours — the neglect of fortune and of soul! But then you may worship nature and still find your way to church; you may be intensely interested in the life of an old apple tree and still cultivate your next-door neighbor, still earn all the fresh air and bread and books that your children need.

The knoll yonder may be a kind of High Place, and its old apple tree a kind of altar for you when you had better not go to church, when your neighbor needs to be let alone, when your children are in danger of too much bread and of too many books — for the time when you are in need of that something which comes only out of the quiet of the fields at the close of day.

"But what is it?" you ask. "Give me its formula." I cannot. Yet you need it and will get it — something that cannot be had of the day, something that Matthew Arnold comes very near suggesting in his lines: —

> The evening comes, the fields are still.
> The tinkle of the thirsty rill,

Unheard all day, ascends again;
Deserted is the half-mown plain,
Silent the swaths! the ringing wain,
The mower's cry, the dog's alarms
All housed within the sleeping farms!
The business of the day is done,
The last-left haymaker is gone.
And from the thyme upon the height
And from the elder-blossom white
And pale dog-roses in the hedge,
And from the mint-plant in the sedge,
In puffs of balm the night-air blows
The perfume which the day foregoes.

I would call it poetry, if it were poetry. And it is poetry, yet it is a great deal more. It is poetry and owls and sour apples and toads; for in this particular old apple dwells also a tree-toad.

It is curious enough, as the summer dusk comes on, to see the round face of the owl in one hole, and out of another in the broken limb above, the flat weazened face of the tree-toad. Philosophic countenances they are, masked with wisdom, both of them: shrewd and penetrating that of the slit-eyed owl; contemplative and soaring in its serene composure the countenance of the transcendental toad. Both creatures

love the dusk; both have come forth to their open doors in order to watch the darkening; both will make off under the cover — one for mice and frogs over the meadow, the other for slugs and insects over the crooked, tangled limbs of the tree.

It is strange enough to see them together, but it is stranger still to think of them together, for it is just such prey as this little toad that the owl has gone over the meadow to catch.

Why does he not take the supper ready here on the shelf? There may be reasons that we, who do not eat tree-toad, know nothing of; but I am inclined to believe that the owl has never seen his fellow lodger in the doorway above, though he must often have heard him piping his gentle melancholy in the gloaming, when his skin cries for rain!

Small wonder if they have never met! for this gray, squat, disc-toed little monster in the hole, or flattened on the bark of the tree like a patch of lichen, may well be one of those things which are hidden from the sharp-eyed owl. Whatever purpose be attributed to his peculiar shape and color, — protective, obliterative, mimicking, — it

is always a source of fresh amazement, the way this largest of our hylas, on the moss-marked rind of an old tree, can utterly blot himself out before your staring eyes.

The common toads and all the frogs have enemies enough, and it would seem from the comparative scarcity of the tree-toads that they must have enemies, too, but I do not know who they are. The scarcity of the tree-toads is something of a puzzle, and all the more to me, that, to my certain knowledge, this toad has lived in the old Baldwin tree, now, for five years. Perhaps he has been several, and not one; for who can tell one tree-toad from another? Nobody; and for that reason I made, some time ago, a simple experiment, in order to see how long a tree-toad might live, unprotected, in his own natural environment.

Upon moving into this house, about seven years ago, we found a tree-toad living in the big hickory by the porch. For the next three springs he reappeared, and all summer long we would find him, now on the tree, now on the porch, often on the railing and backed tight up against a post. Was he one or many? we asked. Then

we marked him; and for the next four years we knew that he was himself alone. How many more years he might have lived in the hickory for us all to pet, I should like to know; but last summer, to our great sorrow, the gypsy-moth killers, poking in the hole, did our little friend to death.

He was worth many worms.

It was interesting, it was very wonderful to me, the instinct for home — the love for home I should like to call it — that this humble little creature showed. A toad is an amphibian to the zoölogist; an ugly gnome with a jeweled eye to the poet; but to the naturalist, the lover of life for its own sake, who lives next door to his toad, who feeds him a fly or a fat grub now and then, who tickles him to sleep with a rose leaf, who waits as thirstily as the hilltop for him to call the summer rain, who knows his going to sleep for the winter, his waking up for the spring — to such an one the jeweled eye and the amphibious habits are but the forewords of a long, marvelous life-history.

This small tree-toad had a home, had it in his soul, I believe, precisely where John Howard

Payne had it, and where many another of us has it. He had it in a tree, too, — in a hickory tree, this one that dwelt by my house; he had it in an apple tree, that one yonder across the meadow.

"East, west,
Hame's best,"

croaked our tree-toad in a tremulous, plaintive minor that wakened memories in the vague twilight of more old, unhappy, far-off things than any other voice I ever knew.

These two tree-toads could not have been induced to trade houses, the hickory for the apple, because a house to a toad means home, and a home is never in the market. There are many more houses in the land than homes. Most of us are only real-estate dealers. Many of us have never had a home; and none of us has ever had more than one. There can be but one — mine — and that has always been, must always be, as imperishable as memory, and as far beyond all barter as the gates of the sunset are beyond my horizon's picket fence of pines.

The toad seems to feel it all, but feels it whole, not analyzed and itemized as a memory. Here in the hickory for four years (for seven, I am

quite sure) he lived, single and alone. He would go down to the meadow when the toads gathered there to lay their eggs, but back he would come, without mate or companion, to his tree. Stronger than love of kind, than love of mate, constant and dominant in his slow cold heart is his instinct for home.

If I go down to the orchard and bring up from the apple tree another toad to dwell in the hole of the hickory, I shall fail. He might remain for the day, but not throughout the night, for with the gathering twilight there steals upon him an irresistible longing, the *Heimweh* which he shares with me; and guided by it, as the bee and the pigeon and the dog are guided, he makes his sure way back to the orchard home.

Would he go back beyond the orchard, over the road, over the wide meadow, over to the Baldwin tree, half a mile away, if I brought him from there? We shall see. During the coming summer I shall mark him in some manner, and bringing him here to the hickory, I shall then watch the old apple tree yonder. It will be a hard, perilous journey. But his longing will not let him rest; and guided by his mysterious sense

of direction — for this *one* place — he will arrive, I am sure, or he will die on the way.

Yet I could wish there were another tree here, besides the apple, and another toad. Suppose he never gets back? Only one toad less? A great deal more than that. Here in the old Baldwin he has made his home for I don't know how long, hunting over its world of branches in the summer, sleeping down in its deep holes during the winter — down under the chips and punk and castings, beneath the nest of the owls, it may be; for my toad in the hickory always buried himself so, down in the débris at the bottom of the hole, where, in a kind of cold storage, he preserved himself until thawed out by the spring. I never pass the old apple in the summer but that I stop to pay my respects to the toad; nor in the winter that I do not pause and think of him asleep in there. He is no mere toad any more. He has passed into a *genius loci*, the Guardian Spirit of the tree, warring in the green leaf against worm and grub and slug, and in the dry leaf hiding himself, a heart of life, within the tree's thin ribs, as if to save the old shell to another summer.

A toad is a toad, and if he never got back to the tree there would be one toad less, nothing more. If anything more, then it is on paper, and it is cant, not toad at all. And so, I suppose, stones are stones, trees trees, brooks brooks — not books and tongues and sermons at all — except on paper and as cant. Surely there are many things in writing that never had any other, any real existence, especially in writing that deals with the out-of-doors. One should write carefully about one's toad; fearfully, indeed, when that toad becomes one's teacher; for teacher my toad in the old Baldwin has many a time been.

Often in the summer dusk I have gone over to sit at his feet and learn some of the things my college professors could not teach me. I have not yet taken my higher degrees. I was graduated A. B. from college. It is A. B. C. that I am working toward here at the old apple tree with the toad.

Seating myself comfortably at the foot of the tree, I wait; the toad comes forth to the edge of his hole above me, settles himself comfortably, and waits. And the lesson begins. The quiet of the summer evening steals out with the wood-

shadows and softly covers the fields. We do not stir. An hour passes. We do not stir. Not to stir is the lesson — one of the majors in this graduate course with the toad.

The dusk thickens. The grasshoppers begin to strum; the owl slips out and drifts away; a whip-poorwill drops on the bare knoll near me, clucks and shouts and shouts again, his rapid repetition a thousand times repeated by the voices that call to one another down the long empty aisles of the swamp; a big moth whirs about my head and is gone; a bat flits squeaking past; a firefly blazes, but is blotted out by the darkness, only to blaze again, and again be blotted, and so passes, his tiny lantern flashing into a night that seems the darker for the quick, unsteady glow.

We do not stir. It is a hard lesson. By all my other teachers I had been taught every manner of stirring, and this unwonted exercise of being still takes me where my body is weakest, and it puts me painfully out of breath in my soul. "Wisdom is the principal thing," my other teachers would repeat, "therefore get wisdom, but keep exceedingly busy all the time. Step lively. Life is short. There are *only* twenty-four hours to the day. The

Devil finds mischief for idle hands to do. Let us then be up and doing" — all of this at random from one of their lectures on "The Simple Life, or the Pace that Kills."

Of course there is more or less of truth in this teaching of theirs. A little leisure has no doubt become a dangerous thing — unless one spend it talking or golfing or automobiling, or aëroplaning or elephant-killing, or in some other diverting manner; otherwise one's nerves, like pulled candy, might set and cease to quiver; or one might even have time to think.

"Keep going," — I quote from another of their lectures, — "keep going; it is the only certainty you have against knowing whither you are going." I learned that lesson well. See me go — with half a breakfast and the whole morning paper; with less of lunch and the 4.30 edition. But I balance my books, snatch the evening edition, catch my car, get into my clothes, rush out to dinner, and spend the evening lecturing or being lectured to. I do everything but think.

But suppose I did think? It could only disturb me — my politics, or ethics, or religion. I had better let the editors and professors and

preachers think for me. The editorial office is such a quiet thought-inducing place; as quiet as a boiler factory; and the thinkers there, from editor-in-chief to the printer's devil, are so thoughtful for the size of the circulation! And the college professors, they have the time and the cloistered quiet needed. But they have pitiful salaries, and enormous needs, and their social status to worry over, and themes to correct, and a fragmentary year to contend with, and Europe to see every summer, and — Is it right to ask them, with all this, to think? We will ask the preachers instead. They are set apart among the divine and eternal things; they are dedicated to thought; they have covenanted with their creeds to think; it is their business to study, but, "to study to be careful and harmless."

It may be, after all, that my politics and ethics and religion need disturbing, as the soil about my fruit trees needs it. Is it the tree? or is it the soil that I am trying to grow? Is it I, or my politics, my ethics, my religion? I will go over to the toad, no matter the cost. I will sit at his feet, where time is nothing, and the worry of work even less. He has all time and no task; he is not obliged to

labor for a living, much less to think. My other teachers all are; they are all professional thinkers; their thoughts are words: editorials, lectures, sermons, — livings. I read them or listen to them. The toad sits out the hour silent, thinking, but I know not what, nor need to know. To think God's thoughts after Him is not so high as to think my own after myself. Why then ask his of the toad, and so interrupt these of mine? Instead we will sit in silence and watch Altair burn along the shore of the sky, and overhead Arcturus, and the rival fireflies flickering through the leaves of the apple tree.

The darkness has come. The toad is scarcely a blur between me and the stars. It is a long look from him, ten feet above me, on past the fireflies to Arcturus and the regal splendors of the Northern Crown — as deep and as far a look as the night can give, and as only the night can give. Against the distant stars, these ten feet between me and the toad shrink quite away; and against the light far off yonder near the pole, the firefly's little lamp becomes a brave but a very lesser beacon.

There are only twenty-four hours to the day — to the day and the night! And how few are

left to that quiet time between the light and the dark! Ours is a hurried twilight. We quit work to sleep; we wake up to work again. We measure the day by a clock; we measure the night by an alarm clock. Life is all ticked off. We are murdered by the second. What we need is a day and a night with wider margins — a dawn that comes more slowly, and a longer lingering twilight. Life has too little selvage; it is too often raw and raveled. Room and quiet and verge are what we want, not more dials for time, nor more figures for the dials. We have things enough, too, more than enough; it is space for the things, perspective, and the right measure for the things that we lack — a measure not one foot short of the distance between us and the stars.

If we get anything out of the fields worth while, it will be this measure, this largeness, and quiet. It may be only an owl or a tree-toad that we go forth to see, but how much more we find — things we cannot hear by day, things long, long forgotten, things we never thought or dreamed before.

The day is none too short, the night none too long; but all too narrow is the edge between.

IV

THE SCARCITY OF SKUNKS

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HE ragged quilt of snow had slipped from the shoulders of the slopes, the gray face of the maple swamp showed a flush of warmth, and the air, out of the south to-day, breathed life, the life of buds and catkins, of sappy bark, oozing gum, and running water — the life of spring; and through the faintly blending breaths, as a faster breeze ran down the hills, I caught a new and unmistakable odor, single, pointed, penetrating, the sign to me of an open door in the wood-lot, to me, indeed, the Open Sesame of spring.

"When does the spring come? And who brings it?" asks the watcher in the woods. "To me spring begins when the catkins on the alders and the pussy-willows begin to swell," writes Mr. Burroughs, "when the ice breaks up on the river and the first sea-gulls come prospecting northward." So I have written, also; written verses even to the pussy-willow, to the bluebird, and to the he-

patica, as spring's harbingers; but never a line yet to celebrate this first forerunner of them all, the gentle early skunk. For it is his presence, blown far across the February snow, that always ends my New England winter and brings the spring. Of course there are difficulties, poetically, with the wood-pussy. I don't remember that even Whitman tried the theme. But, perhaps, the good gray poet never met a spring skunk in the streets of Camden. The animal is comparatively rare in the densely populated cities of New Jersey.

It is rare enough here in Massachusetts; at least, it used to be; though I think, from my observations, that the skunk is quietly on the increase in New England. I feel very sure of this as regards the neighborhood immediate to my farm.

This is an encouraging fact, but hard to be believed, no doubt. I, myself, was three or four years coming to the conviction, often fearing that this little creature, like so many others of our thinning woods, was doomed to disappear. But that was before I turned to keeping hens. I am writing these words as a naturalist and nature-lover, and I am speaking also with the

authority of one who keeps hens. Though a man give his life to the study of the skunk, and have not hens, he is nothing. You cannot say, "Go to, I will write an essay about my skunks." There is no such anomaly as professional nature-loving, as vocational nature-writing. You cannot go into your woods and count your skunks. Not until you have kept hens can you know, can you even have the will to believe, the number of skunks that den in the dark on the purlieus of your farm.

That your neighbors keep hens is not enough. My neighbors' hens were from the first a stone of stumbling to me. That is a peculiarity of next-door hens. It would have been better, I thought, if my neighbors had had no hens. I had moved in among these half-farmer folk, and while I found them intelligent enough, I immediately saw that their attitude toward nature was wholly wrong. They seemed to have no conception of the beauty of nature. Their feeling for the skunk was typical: they hated the skunk with a perfect hatred, a hatred implacable, illogical, and unpoetical, it seemed to me, for it was born of their chicken-breeding.

Here were these people in the lap of nature,

babes in nature's arms, knowing only to draw at her breasts and gurgle, or, the milk failing, to kick and cry. Mother Nature! She was only a bottle and rubber nipple, only turnips and hay and hens to them. Nature a mother? a spirit? a soul? fragrance? harmony? beauty? Only when she cackled like a hen.

Now there is something in the cackle of a hen, a very great deal, indeed, if it is the cackle of your own hen. But the morning stars did not cackle together, and there is still a solemn music in the universe, a music that is neither an anvil nor a barnyard chorus. Life ought to mean more than turnips, more than hay, more than hens to these rural people. It ought, and it must. I had come among them. And what else was my coming but a divine providence, a high and holy mission? I had been sent unto this people to preach the gospel of the beauty of nature. And I determined that my first text should be the skunk.

All of this, likewise, was previous to the period of my hens.

It was now, as I have said, my second February upon the farm, when the telltale wind brought

down this poignant message from the wood-lot. The first spring skunk was out! I knew the very stump out of which he had come — the stump of his winter den. Yes, and the day before, I had actually met the creature in the woods, for he had been abroad now something like a week. He was rooting among the exposed leaves in a sunny dip, and I approached to within five feet of him, where I stood watching while he grubbed in the thawing earth. Buried to the shoulders in the leaves, he was so intent upon his labor that he got no warning of my presence. My neighbors would have knocked him over with a club, — would have done it eagerly, piously, as unto the Lord. What did the Almighty make such vermin for, anyway? No one will phrase an answer; but every one will act promptly, as by command and revelation.

I stood several minutes watching, before the little wood-pussy paused and pulled out his head in order to try the wind. How shocked he was! He had been caught off his guard, and instantly snapped himself into a startled hump, for the whiff he got on the wind said *danger!* — and nigh at hand! Throwing his pointed nose straight

into the air, and swinging it quickly to the four quarters, he fixed my direction, and turning his back upon me, tumbled off in a dreadful hurry for home.

This interesting, though somewhat tame, experience, would have worn the complexion of an adventure for my neighbors, a bare escape, — a ruined Sunday suit, or, at least, a lost jumper or overalls. I had never lost so much as a roundabout in all my life. My neighbors had had innumerable passages with this ramping beast, most of them on the edge of the dark, and many of them verging hard upon the tragic. I had small patience with it all. I wished the whole neighborhood were with me, that I might take this harmless little wood-pussy up in my arms and teach them again the first lesson of the Kingdom of Heaven, and of this earthly Paradise, too, and incidentally put an end forever to these tales of Sunday clothes and nights of banishment in the barn.

As nobody was present to see, of course I did not pick the wood-pussy up. I did not need to prove to myself the baselessness of these wild misgivings; nor did I wish, without good cause,

further to frighten the innocent creature. I had met many a skunk before this, and nothing of note ever had happened. Here was one, taken suddenly and unawares, and what did he do? He merely winked and blinked vacantly at me over the snow, trying vainly to adjust his eyes to the hard white daylight, and then timidly made off as fast as his pathetic legs could carry him, fetching a compass far around toward his den.

I accompanied him, partly to see him safely home, but more to study him on the way, for my neighbors would demand something else than theory and poetry of my new gospel: they would require facts. Facts they should have.

I had been a long time coming to my mind concerning the skunk. I had been thinking years about him; and during the previous summer (my second here on the farm) I had made a careful study of the creature's habits, so that even now I had in hand material of considerable bulk and importance, showing the very great usefulness of the animal. Indeed, I was about ready to embody my beliefs and observations in a monograph, setting forth the need of national protection — of a Committee of One Hundred, say, of

continental scope, to look after the preservation and further introduction of the skunk as the friend and ally of man, as the most useful of all our insectivorous creatures, bird or beast.

What, may I ask, was this one of mine doing here on the edge of the February woods? He was grubbing. He had been driven out of his winter bed by hunger, and he had been driven out into the open snowy sunshine by the cold, because the nights (he is nocturnal) were still so chill that the soil would freeze at night past his ploughing. Thus it chanced, at high noon, that I came upon him, grubbing among my soft, wet leaves, and grubbing for nothing less than obnoxious insects!

My heart warmed to him. He was ragged and thin, he was even weak, I thought, by the way he staggered as he made off. It had been a hard winter for men and for skunks, particularly hard for skunks on account of the unbroken succession of deep snows. This skunk had been frozen into his den, to my certain knowledge, since the last of November.

Nature is a severe mother. The hunger of this starved creature! To be put to bed without even

the broth, and to be locked in, half awake, for nearly three months. Poor little beastie! Perhaps he had n't intelligence enough to know that those gnawings within him were pain. Perhaps our sympathy is all agley. Perhaps. But we are bound to feel it when we watch him satisfying his pangs with the pestiferous insects of our own wood-lot.

I saw him safely home, and then returned to examine the long furrows he had ploughed out among the leaves. I found nothing to show what species of insects he had eaten, but it was enough to know that he had been bent on bugs — gypsy-moth eggs, maybe, on the underside of some stick or stone, where they had escaped the keen eye of the tree-warden. We are greatly exercised over this ghastly caterpillar. But is it entomologists, and national appropriations, and imported parasites that we need to check the ravaging plague? These things might help, doubtless; but I was intending to show in my monograph that it is only skunks we need; it is the scarcity of skunks that is the whole trouble — and the abundance of cats.

My heart warmed, I say, as I watched my one

frail skunk here by the snowy woodside, and it thrilled as I pledged him protection, as I acknowledged his right to the earth, his right to share life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness with me. He could have only a small part in my life, doubtless, but I could enter largely into his, and we could live in amity together — in amity here on *this* bit of the divine earth, anyhow, if nowhere else under heaven.

This was along in February, and I was beginning to set my hens.

A few days later, in passing through the woodlot, I was surprised and delighted to see three skunks in the near vicinity of the den, — residents evidently of the stump! "Think!" I exclaimed to myself, "think of the wild flavor to this tame patch of woods! And the creatures so rare, too, and beneficial! They multiply rapidly, though," I thought, "and I ought to have a fine lot of them by fall. I shall stock the farm with them."

This was no momentary enthusiasm. In a book that I had published some years before I had stoutly championed the skunk. "Like every predatory creature," I wrote, "the skunk more

than balances his debt for corn and chickens by his destruction of obnoxious vermin. He feeds upon insects and mice, destroying great numbers of the latter by digging out the nests and eating the young. But we forget our debt when the chickens disappear, no matter how few we lose. Shall we ever learn to say, when the red-tail swoops among the pigeons, when the rabbits get into the cabbage, when the robins rifle the cherry trees, and when the skunk helps himself to a hen for his Thanksgiving dinner — shall we ever learn to love and understand the fitness of things out-of-doors enough to say, 'But then, poor beastie, thou maun live'?"

Since writing those warm lines I had made further studies upon the skunk, all establishing the more firmly my belief that there is a big balance to the credit of the animal. Meantime, too, I had bought this small farm, with a mowing field and an eight-acre wood-lot on it; with certain liens and attachments on it, also, due to human mismanagement and to interference with the course of Nature in the past. Into the orchard, for instance, had come the San José scale; into the wood-lot had crawled the gypsy-moth — hu-

man blunders! Under the sod of the mowing land had burrowed the white grub of the June-bugs. On the whole fourteen acres rested the black shadow of an insect plague. Nature had been interfered with and thwarted. Man had taken things into his own clumsy hands. It should be so no longer on these fourteen acres. I held the deed to these, not for myself, nor for my heirs, but for Nature. Over these few acres the winds of heaven should blow free, the birds should sing, the flowers should grow, and through the gloaming, unharmed and unaffrighted, the useful skunk should take his own sweet way.

The preceding summer had been a season remarkable for the ravages of the June-bug. The turf in my mowing went all brown and dead suddenly in spite of frequent rains. No cause for the trouble showed on the surface of the field. You could start and with your hands roll up the tough sod by the yard, as if a clean-cutting knife had been run under it about an inch below the crowns. It peeled off under your feet in great flakes. An examination of the soil brought to light the big fat grubs of the June-bugs, millions of the ghastly monsters! They had gone under the grass, eating

off the roots so evenly and so thoroughly that not a square foot of green remained in the whole field.

It was here that the skunk did his good work (I say "the skunk," for there was only one on the farm that summer, I think). I would go into the field morning after morning to count the holes he had made during the night in his hunt for the grubs. One morning I got over a hundred holes, all of them dug since last sundown, and each hole representing certainly one grub, possibly more; for the skunk would hear or smell his prey at work in the soil before attempting to dig.

A hundred grubs for one night, by one skunk! It took me only a little while to figure out the enormous number of grubs that a fair-sized family of skunks would destroy in a summer. A family of skunks would rid my farm of the pest in a single summer and make inroads on the grubs of the entire community.

Ah! the community! the ignorant, short-sighted, nature-hating community! What chance had a family of skunks in this community? And the fire of my mission burned hot within me.

And so did my desire for more skunks. My hay

crop was short, was *nil*, in fact, for the hayfield was as barren of green as the hen-yard. I had to have it ploughed and laid down again to grass. And all because of this scarcity of skunks.

Now, as the green of the springing blades began to show through the melting snow, it was with immense satisfaction that I thought of the three skunks under the stump. That evening I went across to my neighbor's, the milkman's, and had a talk with him over the desirability, the necessity indeed, of encouraging the skunks about us. I told him a good many things about these harmless and useful animals that, with all his farming and chicken-raising, he had never known.

But these rural folk are quite difficult. It is hard to teach them anything worth while, so hopelessly surrounded are they with things — common things. If I could only get them into a college class-room — removed some way from hens and hoes — I might, at least, put them into a receptive attitude. But that cannot be. Perhaps, indeed, I demand too much of them. For, after all, it takes a naturalist, a lover of the out-of-doors, to appreciate the beautiful adjustments in nature. A mere farmer can hardly do it. One needs a keen eye,

but a certain aloofness of soul also, for the deeper meaning and poetry of nature. One needs to spend a vacation, at least, in the wilderness and solitary place, where no other human being has ever come, and there, where the animals know man only as a brother, go to the school of the woods and study the wild folk, one by one, until he discovers them personally, temperamentally, all their likes and dislikes, their little whimseys, freaks, and fancies — all of this, there, far removed from the cankering cares of hens and chickens, for the sake of the right attitude toward nature.

My nearest neighbor had never been to the wilderness. He lacked imagination, too, and a ready pen. Yet he promised not to kill my three skunks in the stump; a rather doubtful pledge, perhaps, but at least a beginning toward the new earth I hoped to see.

Now it was perfectly well known to me that skunks will eat chickens if they have to. But I had had chickens — a few hens — and had never been bothered by skunks. I kept my hens shut up, of course, in a pen — the only place for a hen outside of a pie. I knew, too, that skunks like honey, that they had even tampered with my

hives, reaching in at night through the wide summer entrances and tearing out the brood combs. But I never lost much by these depredations. What I felt more was the destruction of the wild bees and wasps and ground-nesting birds, by the skunks.

But these were trifles! What were a few chickens, bees, yellow-jackets, and even the occasional bird's-nest, against the hay-devouring grubs of the June-bug! And as for the characteristic odor which drifted in now and again with the evening breeze, that had come to have a pleasant quality for me, floating down across my two wide acres of mowing.

February passed gently into March, and my chickens began to hatch. Every man must raise chickens at some period of his life, and I was starting in for my turn now. Hay had been my specialty heretofore, making two blades grow where there had been one very thin one. But once your two acres are laid down, and you have a stump full of skunks, near by, against the ravages of the June-bugs, then there is nothing for you but chickens or something, while you wait. I got Rhode Island Reds, fancy exhibition stock,

—for what is the use of chickens if you cannot take them to the show?

The chickens began to hatch, little downy balls of yellow, with their pedigrees showing right through the fuzz. How the sixty of them grew! I never lost one. And now the second batch of sitters would soon be ready to come off.

Then one day, at the morning count, five of one hen's brood were gone! I counted again. I counted all the other broods. Five were gone!

My nearest neighbor had cats, mere barn cats, as many as ten, at the least. I had been suspicious of those cats from the first. So I got a gun. Then more of my chickens disappeared. I could count only forty-seven.

I shifted the coop, wired it in, and stretched a wire net over the top of the run. Nothing could get in, nor could a chicken get out. All the time I was waiting for the cat.

A few nights after the moving of the coop a big hole was dug under the wire fence of the run, another hole under the coop, and the entire brood of Rhode Island Reds was taken.

Then I took the gun and cut across the pasture to my neighbor's.

"Hard luck," he said. "It's a big skunk. Here, you take these traps, and you 'll catch him; anybody can catch a skunk."

And I did catch him. I killed him, too, in spite of the great scarcity of the creatures. Yet I was sorry, and, perhaps, too hasty; for catching him near the coop was no proof. He might have wandered this way by chance. I should have put him in a bag and carried him down to Valley Swamp and liberated him.

That day, while my neighbor was gone with his milk wagon, I slipped through the back pasture and hung the two traps up on their nail in the can-house.

I went anxiously to the chicken-yard the next morning. All forty came out to be counted. It must have been the skunk, I was thinking, as I went on into the brooding-house, where six hens were still sitting.

One of the hens was off her nest and acting queerly. Her nest was empty! Not a chick, not a bit of shell! I lifted up the second hen in the row, and of her thirteen eggs, only three were left. The hen next to her had five eggs; the fourth hen had four. Forty chickens gone (count-

ing them before they were hatched), all in one night.

I hitched up the horse and drove thoughtfully to the village, where I bought six skunk-traps.

"Goin' skunkin' some, this spring," the store man remarked, as he got me the traps, adding, "Well, they 's some on 'em. I 've seen a scaac'ty of a good many commodities, but I never yet see a scaac'ty o' skunks."

I did n't stop to discuss the matter, being a trifle uncertain just then as to my own mind, but hurried home with my six traps. Six, I thought, would do to begin with, though I really had no conception of the number of cats (or skunks) it had taken to dispose of the three and one third dozens of eggs (at three dollars a dozen!) in a single night.

Early that afternoon I covered each sitting hen so that even a mouse could not get at her, and fixing the traps, I distributed them about the brooding-house floor; then, as evening came on, I pushed a shell into each barrel of the gun, took a comfortable perch upon a keg in the corner of the house, and waited.

I had come to stay. Something was going to

happen. And something did happen, away on in the small hours of the morning, namely — one little skunk. He walked into a trap while I was dozing. He seemed pretty small hunting then, but he looms larger now, for I have learned several more things about skunks than I knew when I had the talk with my neighbor: I have learned, for one thing, that forty eggs, soon to hatch, are just an average meal for the average half-grown skunk.

The catching of these two thieves put an end to the depredations, and I began again to exhibit in my dreams, when one night, while sound asleep, I heard a frightful commotion among the hens. I did the hundred-yard dash to the chicken-house in my unforgotten college form, but just in time to see the skunk cross the moonlit line into the black woods ahead of me.

He had wrought dreadful havoc among the thoroughbreds. What devastation a skunk, single-handed, can achieve in a pen of young chickens beggars all description.

I was glad that it was dead of night, that the world was home and asleep in its bed. I wanted no sympathy. I wished only to be alone, alone in

the cool, the calm, the quiet of this serene and beautiful midnight. Even the call of a whippoorwill in the adjoining pasture worried me. I desired to meditate, yet clear, consecutive thinking seemed strangely difficult. I felt like one disturbed. I was out of harmony with this peaceful environment. Perhaps I had hurried too hard, or I was too thinly clothed, or perhaps my feet were cold and wet. I only know, as I stooped to untwist a long and briery runner from about my ankle, that there was great confusion in my mind, and in my spirit there was chaos. I felt myself going to pieces, — I, the nature-lover! Had I not advocated the raising of a few extra hens just for the sake of keeping the screaming hawk in air and the wild fox astir in our scanty picnic groves? And had I not said as much for the skunk? Why, then, at one in the morning should I, nor clothed, nor in my right mind, be picking my barefoot way among the tangled dewberry vines behind the barn, swearing by the tranquil stars to blow the white-striped carcass of that skunk into ten million atoms if I had to sit up all the next night to do it?

One o'clock in the morning was the fiend's

hour. There could be no unusual risk in leaving the farm for a little while in the early evening, merely to go to the bean supper over at the chapel at the Corner. So we were dressed and ready to start, when I spied one of my hens outside the yard, trying to get in.

Hurrying down, I caught her, and was turning back to the barn, when I heard a slow, faint rustling among the bushes behind the hen-house. I listened! Something was moving cautiously through the dead leaves! Tiptoeing softly around, I surprised a large skunk making his way slowly toward the hen-yard fence.

I grabbed a stone and hurled it, jumping, as I let it drive, for another. The flying missile hit within an inch of the creature's nose, hard upon a large flat rock over which he was crawling. The impact was stunning, and before the old rascal could get to his groggy feet, I had fallen upon him — literally — and done for him.

But I was very sorry. I hope that I shall never get so excited as to fall upon another skunk, — never!

I was picking myself up, when I caught a low cry from the direction of the house — half scream,

half shout. It was a woman's voice, the voice of my wife, I thought. Was something the matter?

"Hurry!" I heard. But how could I hurry? My breath was gone, and so were my spectacles, and other more important things besides, while all about me poured a choking blinding smother. I fought my way out.

"Oh, hurry!"

I was on the jump; I was already rounding the barn, when a series of terrified shrieks issued from the front of the house. An instant more and I had come. But none too soon, for there stood the dear girl, backed into a corner of the porch, her dainty robes drawn close about her, and a skunk, a wee baby of a skunk, climbing confidently up the steps toward her.

"Why *are* you so slow!" she gasped. "I've been yelling here for an hour! — Oh! do — don't kill that little thing, but shoo it away, quick!"

She certainly had not been yelling an hour, nor anything like it. But there was no time for argument now, and as for shooing little skunks, I was past that. I don't know exactly what I did say, though I am positive that it was n't "shoo." I was clutching a great stone, that I had run with

all the way from behind the hen-yard, and letting it fly, I knocked the little creature into a harmless bunch of fur.

The family went over to the bean supper and left me all alone on the farm. But I was calm now, with a strange, cold calmness born of extremity. Nothing more could happen to me; I was beyond further harm. So I took up the bodies of the two creatures, and carried them, together with some of my late clothing, over beyond the ridge for burial. Then I returned by way of my neighbor's, where I borrowed two sticks of blasting-powder and a big cannon fire-cracker. I had watched my neighbor use these explosives on the stumps in a new piece of meadow. The next morning, with an axe, a crowbar, shovel, gun, blasting-powder, and the cannon-cracker, I started for the stump in the wood-lot. I wished the cannon-cracker had been a keg of powder. I could tamp a keg of powder so snugly into the hole of those skunks!

It was a beautiful summer morning, tender with the half-light of breaking dawn, and fresh with dew. Leaving my kit at the mouth of the skunks' den, I sat down on the stump to wait a

moment, for the loveliness and wonder of the opening day came swift upon me. From the top of a sapling, close by, a chewink sent his simple, earnest song ringing down the wooded slope, and, soft as an echo, floated up from the swampy tangle of wild grape and azalea the pure notes of a wood thrush, mellow and globed, and almost fragrant of the thicket where the white honeysuckle was in bloom. Voices never heard at other hours of the day were vocal now; odors and essences that vanish with the dew hung faint in the air; shapes and shadows and intimations of things that slip to cover from the common light, stirred close about me. It was very near — the gleam! the vision splendid! How close to a revelation seems every dawn! And this early summer dawn, how near a return of that

> time when meadow, grove, and stream,
> The earth and every common sight
> To me did seem
> Apparelled in celestial light.

From the crest of my ridge I looked out over the treetops far away to the Blue Hills still slumbering in the purple west. How huge and prone they lie! How like their own constant azure does

the spirit of rest seem to wrap them round! On their distant slopes it is never common day, never more than dawn, for the shadows always sleep among their hollows, and a haze of changing blues, their own peculiar beauty, hangs, even at high noon, like a veil upon them, shrouding them with largeness and mystery.

A rustle in the dead leaves down the slope recalled me. I reached instinctively for the gun, but stayed my hand. Slowly nosing his way up the ridge, came a full-grown skunk, his tail a-drag, his head swinging close to the ground. He was coming home to the den, coming leisurely, contentedly, carelessly, as if he had a right to live. I sat very still. On he came, scarcely checking himself as he winded me. How like the dawn he seemed! — the black of night with the white of day — the furtive dawn slipping into its den! He sniffed at the gun and cannon-cracker, made his way over them, brushed past me, and calmly disappeared beneath the stump.

The chewink still sang from the top of the sapling, but the tame broad day had come. I stayed a little while, looking off still at the distant hills. We had sat thus, my six-year-old and

I, only a few days before, looking away at these same hills, when the little fellow, half questioningly, half pensively asked, "Father, how can the Blue Hills be so beautiful and have rattlesnakes?"

I gathered up the kit, gun and cannon-cracker, and started back toward home, turning the question of hills and snakes and skunks over and over as I went along. Over and over the question still turns: How can the Blue Hills be so beautiful? The case of my small wood-lot is easier: beautiful it must ever be, but its native spirit, the untamed spirit of the original wilderness, the free wild spirit of the primeval forest, shall flee it, and vanish forever, with this last den of the skunks.

V

THE NATURE-WRITER

THE NATURE-WRITER

WELLING inland, far from those of us who go down to the sea in manuscripts, may be found the reader, no doubt, to whom the title of this essay is not anathema, to whom the word nature still means the real outdoors, as the word culture may still mean things other than "sweetness and light." It is different with us. We shy at the *word* nature. Good, honest term, it has suffered a sea-change with us; it has become literary. Piety suffers the same change when it becomes professional. There has grown up about nature as a literary term a vocabulary of cant, — nature-lover, nature-writer, nature- — Throw the stone for me, you who are clean! Inseparably now these three travel together, arm in arm, like Tom, Dick, and Harry — the world, the flesh, and the devil. Name one, and the other two appear, which is sad enough for the nature-writer, because a word is known by the company it keeps.

The nature-writer deserves, maybe, his dubious reputation; he is more or less of a fraud, perhaps. And perhaps everybody else is, more or less. I am sure of it as regards preachers and plumbers and politicians and men who work by the day. Yet I have known a few honest men of each of these several sorts, although I can't recall just now the honest plumber. I have known honest nature-writers, too; there are a number of them, simple, single-minded, and purposefully poor. I have no mind, however, thus to pronounce upon them, dividing the sheep from the goats, lest haply I count myself in with the wrong fold. My desire, rather, is to see what nature-writing, pure and undefiled, may be, and the nature-writer, what manner of writer he ought to be.

For it is plain that the nature-writer has now evolved into a distinct, although undescribed, literary species. His origins are not far to seek, the course of his development not hard to trace, but very unsatisfactory is the attempt, as yet, to classify him. We all know a nature-book at sight, no matter how we may doubt the nature in it; we all know that the writer of such a book

must be a nature-writer; yet this is not describing him scientifically by any means.

Until recent years the nature-writer had been hardly more than a variant of some long-established species — of the philosopher in Aristotle; of the moralizer in Theobaldus; of the scholar and biographer in Walton; of the traveler in Josselyn; of the poet in Burns. But that was in the feudal past. Since then the land of letters has been redistributed; the literary field, like every other field, has been cut into intensified and highly specialized patches — the short story for you, the muck-rake essay for me, or magazine verse, or wild animal biography. The paragraph of outdoor description in Scott becomes the modern nature-sketch; the "Lines to a Limping Hare" in Burns run into a wild animal romance of about the length of "The Last of the Mohicans"; the occasional letter of Gilbert White's grows into an annual nature-volume, this year's being entitled "Buzz-Buzz and Old Man Barberry; or, The Thrilling Young Ladyhood of a Better-Class Bluebottle Fly." The story that follows is how she never would have escaped the net of Old Man Barberry had she been a butter-

fly — a story which only the modern nature-writing specialist would be capable of handling. Nature-writing and the automobile business have developed vastly during the last few years.

It is Charles Kingsley, I think, who defines "a thoroughly good naturalist" as one "who knows his own parish thoroughly," a definition, all questions of style aside, that accurately describes the nature-writer. He has field enough for his pen in a parish; he can hardly know more and know it intimately enough to write about it. For the nature-writer, while he may be more or less of a scientist, is never mere scientist — zoölogist or botanist. Animals are not his theme; flowers are not his theme. Nothing less than the universe is his theme, as it pivots on him, around the distant boundaries of his immediate neighborhood.

His is an emotional, not an intellectual, point of view; a literary, not a scientific, approach; which means that he is the axis of his world, its great circumference, rather than any fact — any flower, or star, or tortoise. Now to the scientist the tortoise is the thing: the particular species *Thalassochelys kempi;* of the family Testudinidæ; of the order Chelonia; of the class

Reptilia; of the branch Vertebrata. But the nature-writer never pauses over this matter to capitalize it. His tortoise may or may not come tagged with this string of distinguishing titles. A tortoise is a tortoise for a' that, particularly if it should happen to be an old Sussex tortoise which has been kept for thirty years in a yard by the nature-writer's friend, and which "On the 1st November began to dig the ground in order to the forming of its hybernaculum, which it had fixed on just beside a great tuft of hepaticas.

"P. S. — In about three days after I left Sussex, the tortoise retired into the ground under the hepatica."

This is a bit of nature-writing by Gilbert White, of Selborne, which sounds quite a little like science, but which you noticed was really spoiled as science by its "tuft of hepaticas." There is no buttonhole in science for the nosegay. And when, since the Vertebrates began, did a scientific tortoise ever *retire?*

One more quotation, I think, will make clear my point, namely, that the nature-writer is not detached from himself and alone with his fact,

like the scientist, but is forever relating his tortoise to himself. The lines just quoted were from a letter dated April 12, 1772. Eight years afterwards, in another letter, dated Selborne, April 21, 1780, and addressed to "the Hon. Daines Barrington," the good rector writes: —

"Dear Sir, — The old Sussex tortoise, that I have mentioned to you so often, is become my property. I dug it out of its winter dormitory in March last, when it was enough awakened to express its resentments by hissing, and, packing it in a box with earth, carried it eighty miles in post-chaises. The rattle and hurry of the journey so perfectly roused it that, when I turned it out on the border, it walked twice down to the bottom of my garden."

Not once, not three times, but *twice* down to the bottom of the garden! We do not question it for a moment; we simply think of the excellent thesis material wasted here in making a mere popular page of nature-writing. Gilbert White never got his Ph. D., if I remember, because, I suppose, he stopped counting after the tortoise made its second trip, and because he kept the creature among the hepaticas of the garden, in-

stead of on a shelf in a bottle of alcohol. Still, let us admit, and let the college professors, who do research work upon everything except their students, admit, that walking twice to the bottom of a garden is not a very important discovery. But how profoundly interesting it was to Gilbert White! And how like a passage from the Pentateuch his record of it! Ten years he woos this tortoise (it was fourteen that Jacob did for Rachel) and wins it — with a serene and solemn joy. He digs it out of its winter dormitory (a hole in the ground), packs it carefully in a box, carries it hurriedly, anxiously, by post-chaises for eighty miles, rousing it perfectly by the end of the journey, when, liberating it in the rectory yard, he stands back to see what it will do; and, lo! *it walks twice to the bottom of the garden!*

By a thoroughly good naturalist Kingsley may have meant a thoroughly good nature-writer, for I think he had in mind Gilbert White, who certainly was a thoroughly good naturalist, and who certainly knew his own parish thoroughly. In the letters from which I have quoted the gentle rector was writing the natural history of Selborne, his parish. But how could he write the natural

history of Selborne when his tortoise was away over in Sussex!

> A tortoise down by Sussex's brim
> A Sussex tortoise was to him,
> And it was nothing more —

nothing at all for the "Natural History of Selborne" until he had gone after it and brought it home.

Thus all nature-writers do with all their nature in some manner or other, not necessarily by post-chaise for eighty miles. It is characteristic of the nature-writer, however, to bring home his out-doors, to domesticate his nature, to relate it all to himself. His is a dooryard universe, his earth a flat little planet turning about a hop-pole in his garden — a planet mapped by fields, ponds, and cow-paths, and set in a circumfluent sea of neighbor townships, beyond whose shores he neither goes to church, nor works out his taxes on the road, nor votes appropriations for the schools.

He is limited to his parish because he writes about only so much of the world as he lives in, as touches him, as makes for him his home. He may wander away, like Thoreau, to the Maine woods, or down along the far-off shores of Cape

Cod; but his best writing will be that about his hut at Walden.

It is a large love for the earth as a dwelling-place, a large faith in the entire reasonableness of its economy, a large joy in all its manifold life, that moves the nature-writer. He finds the earth most marvelously good to live in — himself its very dust; a place beautiful beyond his imagination, and interesting past his power to realize — a mystery every way he turns. He comes into it as a settler into a new land, to clear up so much of the wilderness as he shall need for a home.

Thoreau perhaps, of all our nature-writers, was the wildest wild man, the least domestic in his attitude. He went off far into the woods, a mile and a half from Concord village, to escape domestication, to seek the wild in nature and to free the wild in himself. And what was his idea of becoming a wild man but to build a cabin and clear up a piece of ground for a bean-patch! He was solid Concord beneath his war-paint — a thin coat of savagery smeared on to scare his friends whenever he went to the village — a walk which he took very often. He differed from Gilbert White as his cabin at Walden differed from the

quaint old cottage at Selborne. But cabin and cottage alike were to dwell in; and the bachelor of the one was as much in need of a wife, and as much in love with the earth, as the bachelor in the other. Thoreau's "Walden" is as parochial and as domestic with its woodchuck and beans as White's "Natural History of Selborne" with its tame tortoise and garden.

In none of our nature-writers, however, is this love for the earth more manifest than in John Burroughs. It is constant and dominant in him, an expression of his religion. He can see the earth only as the best possible place to live in — to live *with* rather than in or on; for he is unlike the rector of Selborne and the wild-tame man of Walden in that he is married and a farmer — conditions, these, to deepen one's domesticity. Showing somewhere along every open field in Burroughs's books is a piece of fence, and among his trees there is always a patch of gray sloping roof. He grew up on a farm (a most excellent place to grow up on), became a clerk, but not for long, then got him a piece of land, built him a home out of unhewn stone, and set him out an eighteen-acre vineyard. And ever since he has lived in his

vineyard, with the Hudson River flowing along one side of it, the Catskills standing along another side of it, with the horizon all around, and overhead the sky, and everywhere, through everything, the pulse of life, the song of life, the sense of home!

He loves the earth, for the earth is home.

"I would gladly chant a pæan," he exclaims, "for the world as I find it. What a mighty interesting place to live in! If I had my life to live over again, and had my choice of celestial abodes, I am sure I should take this planet, and I should choose these men and women for my friends and companions. This great rolling sphere with its sky, its stars, its sunrises and sunsets, and with its outlook into infinity — what could be more desirable? What more satisfying? Garlanded by the seasons, embosomed in sidereal influences, thrilling with life, with a heart of fire and a garment of azure seas and fruitful continents — one might ransack the heavens in vain for a better or a more picturesque abode."

A full-throated hymn, this, to the life that is, in the earth that is, a hymn without taint of cant, without a single note of that fevered desire for a

land that is fairer than this, whose gates are of pearl and whose streets are paved with gold. If there is another land, may it be as fair as this! And a pair of bars will be gate enough, and gravel, cinders, grass, even March mud, will do for paving; for all that one will need there, as all that one needs here — here in New England in March — is to have "arctics" on one's feet and an equator about one's heart. The desire for heaven is natural enough, for how could one help wanting more after getting through with this? But he sins and comes short of the glory of God who would be quit of this world for the sake of a better one. There is n't any better one. This one is divine. And as for those dreams of heaven in old books and monkish hymns, they cannot compare for glory and for downright domestic possibilities with the prospect of these snow-clad Hingham hills from my window this brilliant winter morning.

That "this world is not my resting-place" almost any family man can believe nowadays, but that "this world is not my home" I can't believe at all. However poor a resting-place we make of it, however certain of going hence upon a "longe journey," we may not find this earth

anything else than home without confessing ourselves tenants here by preference, and liable, therefore, to pay rent throughout eternity. The best possible use for this earth is to make a home of it, and for this span of life, to live it like a human, earth-born being.

Such is the *credo* of the nature-writer. Not until it can be proved to him that eternal day is more to his liking than the sweet alternation of day and night, that unending rest is less monotonous than his round of labor until the evening, that streets of gold are softer for his feet than dirt roads with borders of grass and dandelions, that ceaseless hallelujahs about a throne exalt the excellency of God more than the quiet contemplation of the work of His fingers — the moon and the stars which He has ordained — not until, I say, it can be proved to him that God did not make this world, or, making it, spurned it, cursed it, that heaven might seem the more blessed — not until then will he forego his bean-patch at Walden, his vineyard at West Park, his garden at Selborne; will he deny to his body a house-lot on this little planet, and the range of this timed and tidy universe to his soul.

As between himself and nature, then, the thoroughly good nature-writer is in love — a purely personal state; lyric, emotional, rather than scientific, wherein the writer is not so much concerned with the facts of nature as with his view of them, his feelings for them, as they environ and interpret him, or as he centres and interprets them.

Were this all, it would be a simple story of love. Unfortunately, nature-writing has become an art, which means some one looking on, and hence it means self-consciousness and adaptation, the writer forced to play the difficult part of loving his theme not less, but loving his reader more.

For the reader, then, his test of the nature-writer will be the extreme test of sincerity. The nature-writer (and the poet) more than many writers is limited by decree to his experiences — not to what he has seen or heard only, but as strictly to what he has truly felt. All writing must be sincere. Is it that nature-writing and poetry must be spontaneously sincere? Sincerity is the first and greatest of the literary commandments. The second is like unto the first. Still there is con-

siderable difference between the inherent marketableness of a cold thought and a warm, purely personal emotion. One has a right to sell one's ideas, to barter one's literary inventions; one has a right, a duty it may be, to invent inventions for sale; but one may not, without sure damnation, make "copy" of one's emotions. In other words, one may not invent emotions, nor observations either, for the literary trade. The sad case with much of our nature-writing is that it has become professional, and so insincere, not answering to genuine observation nor to genuine emotion, but to the bid of the publisher.

You will know the sincere nature-writer by his fidelity to fact. But, alas! suppose I do not know the fact? To be sure. And the nature-writer thought of that, too, and penned his solemn, pious preface, wherein he declares that the following observations are exactly as he personally saw them; that they are true altogether; that he has the affidavits to prove it; and the Indians and the Eskimos to swear the affidavits prove it. Of course you are bound to believe after that; but you wish the preface did not make it so unnecessarily hard.

The sincere nature-writer, because he knows he cannot prove it, and that you cannot prove it, and that the scientists cannot prove it, knows that he must not be asked for proofs, that he must be above suspicion, and so he sticks to the truth as the wife of Cæsar to her spouse.

Let the nature-writer only chronicle his observations as Dr. C. C. Abbott does in "A Naturalist's Rambles about Home," or let him dream a dream about his observations as Maeterlinck does in "The Life of the Bee," yet is he still confined to the truth as a hermit crab to his shell — a hard, inelastic, unchangeable, indestructible house that he cannot adapt, but must himself be adapted to, or else abandon. Chronicle and romance alike we want true to fact. But this particular romance about the Bee will not thus qualify. It was not written for beekeepers, even amateur beekeepers, for they all know more or less about bees, and hence they would not understand the book. It was written for those, the city-faring folk, like my market-man, who asked me how many pounds of honey a bee would gather up in a year, and whether I kept more than one bee in a hive. A great many persons must have read "The Life

of the Bee," but only one of them, so far as I know, had ever kept bees, and she had just a single swarm in between the wall of her living-room and the weather-boards outside. But she had listened to them through the wall, and she sent me her copy of "The Life," begging me to mark on the margins wherever the Bee of the book was unlike her bee in the wall. She had detected a difference in the buzz of the two bees.

Now the two bees ought to buzz alike — one buzz, distinct and always distinguishable from the buzz of the author. In the best nature-writing the author is more than his matter, but he is never identical with it; and not until we know which is which, and that the matter is true, have we faith in the author.

I knew a big boy once who had almost reached the footprint in "Robinson Crusoe" (the tragedy of *almost* reaching it!) when some one blunderingly told him that the book was all a story, made up, not true at all; no such island; no such Crusoe! The boy shut up the book and put it forever from him. He wanted it true. He had thought it true, because it had been so real.

Robbed of its reality, he was unable to make it true again.

Most of us recover from this shock in regard to books, asking only that they seem real. But we are eternally childish, curious, credulous, in our thought of nature; she is so close and real to us, and yet so shadowy, hidden, mysterious, and remote! We are eager to listen to any tale, willing to believe anything, if only it be true. Nay, we are willing to believe it true — we *were*, I should say, until, like the boy with the book, we were rudely told that all this fine writing was made up, that we have no such kindred in the wilds, and no such wilds. Then we said in our haste, all men — who write nature-books — are liars.

"How much of this is real?" asked a keen and anxious reader, eyeing me narrowly, as she pointed a steady finger at an essay of mine in the "Atlantic." "Have you, sir, a farm and four real boys of your own, or are they *faked?*"

"Good heavens, madam!" I exclaimed. "Has it come to this? My boys faked!"

But it shows how the thoughtful and the fearful regard the literary naturalist, and how para-

mount is the demand for honesty in the matter of mere fact, to say nothing of the greater matter of expression.

Only yesterday, in a review in the "Nation" of an animal-man book, I read: "The best thing in the volume is the description of a fight between a mink and a raccoon — or so it seems. Can this be because the reader does not know the difference between a mink and a raccoon, and does know the difference between a human being and the story-teller's manikin?"

This is the wandering wood, this Errour's den,

is the feeling of the average reader — of even the "Nation's" book reviewer — nowadays, toward nature-writing, a state of mind due to the recent revelations of a propensity in wild-animal literature to stand up rather than to go on all fours.

Whatever of the Urim and of the Thummim you put into your style, whatever of the literary lights and the perfections, see to it that you make the facts "after their pattern, which hath been shewed thee in the mount."

Thou shalt not bear false witness as to the facts.

Nor is this all. For the sad case with much nature-writing, as I have said, is that it not only fails to answer to genuine observation, but it also fails to answer to genuine emotion. Often as we detect the unsound natural history, we much oftener are aware of the unsound, the insincere, art of the author.

Now the facts of nature, as Mr. Burroughs says, are the material of nature literature — of *one* kind of such literature, let me add; for, while fabrications can be made only into lies, there may be another kind of good nature-literature compounded wholly of fancies. Facts, to quote Mr. Burroughs again, are the flora upon which the nature-writer lives. "I can do nothing without them." Of course he could not. But Chaucer could. Indeed, Chaucer could do nothing with the facts; he had to have fancies. The truth in his story of the Cock and the Fox is a different kind of truth from the truth about Burroughs's "Winter Neighbors," yet no less the truth. Good nature-writing is literature, not science, and the truth we demand first and last is a literary truth — the fidelity of the writer to himself. He may elect to use facts for his material; yet they are

only material, and no better as material than fancies. For it is not matter that counts last in literature; it is manner. It is spirit that counts. It is the man. Only honest men make literature. Writers may differ in their purpose, as Burroughs in his purpose to guide you through the woods differs from Chaucer's purpose to entertain you by the fire; but they are one in their spirit of honesty.

Chaucer pulls a long face and begins his tale of the Cock and the Fox with a vivid and very realistic description of a widow's cottage,

> B'syde a grovë, standing in a dalë,

as a setting, not for the poor widow and her two daughters, not at all; but rather to stage the heroic comedy between Chauntecleer and his favorite wife, the scarlet-eyed Pertelote.

It is just before daybreak. They are not up yet, not off the roost, when they get into a discussion about the significance of dreams, Chauntecleer having had a very bad dream during the night. The dispute waxes as it spreads out over medicine, philosophy, theology, and psychology. Chauntecleer quotes the classics, cites famous stories, talks Latin to her: —

> For, also sicker as *In principio*
> *Mulier est hominis confusio;*

translating it for her thus: —

> Madam, the sentence of this Latin is —
> Woman is mannës joy and all his blis,

while she tells him he needs a pill for his liver in spite of the fact that he wears a beard. It is fine scorn, but passing sad, following so close upon the old English love song that Chauntecleer was wont to wake up singing.

It is here, at this critical juncture of the nature-story, that Chaucer pauses to remark seriously: —

> For thilkë tyme, as I have understondë,
> Bestës and briddës couldë speke and singë.

Certainly they could; and "speking and singing in thilkë tyme" seems much more natural for "bestës and briddës" than many of the things they do nowadays.

Here, again, is Izaak Walton, as honest a man as Chaucer — a lover of nature, a writer on angling; who knew little about angling, and less about nature; whose facts are largely fancies; but — what of it? Walton quotes, as a probable fact, that pickerel hatch out of the seeds of the pickerel-

weed; that toads are born of fallen leaves on the bottoms of ponds. He finds himself agreeing with Pliny "that many flies have their birth, or being, from a dew that in the spring falls upon the leaves of the trees"; and, quoting the divine du Bartas, he sings:—

> So slow Boötes underneath him sees
> In th' icy isles those goslings hatch'd of trees,
> Whose fruitful leaves, falling into the water,
> Are turn'd, they say, to living fowls soon after.

But the "Compleat Angler" is not a scientific work on fishes, nor a handbook on angling for anglers. It is a book for all that are lovers of literature; for "all that are lovers of virtue; and dare trust in his providence; and be quiet; and go a Angling."

This is somewhat unscientific, according to our present light; but, wonderful as it seemed to Walton, it was all perfectly natural according to his light. His facts are faulty, yet they are the best he had. So was his love the best he had; but that was without fault, warm, deep, intense, sincere.

Our knowledge of nature has so advanced since Walton's time, and our attitude has so changed,

that the facts of nature are no longer enough for literature. We know all that our writer knows; we have seen all that he can see. He can no longer surprise us; he can no longer instruct us; he can no longer fool us. The day of the marvelous is past; the day of the *cum laude* cat and the *magna cum laude* pup is past, the day of the things that I alone have seen is past; and the day of the things that I, in common with you, have honestly felt, is come.

There should be no suggestion in a page of nature-writing that the author — penetrated to the heart of some howling summer camp for his raw material; that he ever sat on his roof or walked across his back yard in order to write a book about it. But nature-books, like other books, are gone for that way — always and solely for the pot. Such books are "copy" only — poor copy at that. There is nothing new in them; for the only thing you can get by going afar for it is a temptation to lie; and no matter from what distance you fetch a falsehood — even from the top of the world — you cannot disguise the true complexion of it. Take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, and

you will find nothing new there; ascend into heaven or make your bed in hell for copy, as is the fashion nowadays — But you had better look after your parish, and go faithfully about your chores; and if you have a garden with a tortoise in it, and you love them, and love to write about them, then write.

Nature-writing must grow more and more human, personal, interpretative. If I go into the wilderness and write a book about it, it must be plain to my reader that "the writing of the book was only a second and finer enjoyment of my holiday in the woods." If my chippy sings, it must sing a chippy's simple song, not some gloria that only "the careless angels know." It must not do any extraordinary thing for me; but it may lead me to do an extraordinary thing — to have an extraordinary thought, or suggestion, or emotion. It may mean extraordinary things to me; things that have no existence in nature, whose beginnings and ends are in me. I may never claim that I, because of exceptional opportunities, or exceptional insight, or exceptional powers of observation, have discovered these marvelous things here in the wilds of Hingham. My

pages may be anthropomorphic, human; not, however, because I humanize my bees and toads, but because I am human, and nature is meaningful ultimately only as it is related to me. I must not confuse myself with nature; nor yet "struggle against fact and law to develop and keep" my "own individuality." I must not anthropomorphize nature; never denature nature; never follow my own track through the woods, imagining that I am on the trail of a better-class wolf or a two-legged bear. I must never sentimentalize over nature again — write no more about "Buzz-Buzz and Old Man Barberry"; write no more about wailing winds and weeping skies; for mine is not "a poet's vision dim," but an open-eyed, scientific sight of things as they actually are. Once I have seen them, gathered them, if then they turn to poetry, let them turn. For so does the squash turn to poetry when it is brought in from the field. It turns to pie; it turns to poetry; and it still remains squash.

Good nature-literature, like all good literature, is more lived than written. Its immortal part hath elsewhere than the ink-pot its beginning. The soul that rises with it, its life's star, first

went down behind a horizon of real experience, then rose from a human heart, the source of all true feeling, of all sincere form. Good nature-writing particularly must have a pre-literary existence as lived reality; its writing must be only the necessary accident of its being lived again in thought. It will be something very human, very natural, warm, quick, irregular, imperfect, with the imperfections and irregularities of life. And the nature-writer will be very human, too, and so very faulty; but he will have no lack of love for nature, and no lack of love for the truth. Whatever else he does, he will never touch the flat, disquieting note of make-believe. He will never invent, never pretend, never pose, never shy. He will be honest — which is nothing unusual for birds and rocks and stars; but for human beings, and for nature-writers very particularly, it is a state less common, perhaps, than it ought to be.

VI

JOHN BURROUGHS

JOHN BURROUGHS

OHN BURROUGHS began his literary career (and may he so end it!) by writing an essay for the "Atlantic Monthly," as good an introduction (and conclusion), speaking by the rhetoric, as a lifelong composition need have. That first essay entitled "Expression," "a somewhat Emersonian Expression," says its author, was printed in the "Atlantic" for November, 1860, which was fifty years ago. Fifty years are not threescore and ten; many men have lived past threescore and ten, but not many men have written continuously for the "Atlantic" for fifty years with eye undimmed and natural force unabated. Mr. Burroughs's eye for the truth of nature has grown clearer during these fifty years, and the vigor of his youth has steadied into a maturity of strength which in some of his latest essays — "The Long Road," for instance — lifts one and bears one down the unmeasured reaches of geologic time, compassing the timelessness of

time, its beginninglessness, its endinglessness, as none of his earlier chapters have done.

Many men have written more than Mr. Burroughs. His eighteen or twenty books, as books may be turned out, are nothing remarkable for fifty years of work. It is not their numbers, but the books, that are remarkable, that among them should be found "Wake-Robin," "Winter Sunshine," "Birds and Poets," "Locusts and Wild Honey," "Pepacton," "Fresh Fields," "Signs and Seasons," "Riverby," "Far and Near," "Ways of Nature," and "Leaf and Tendril"; for these eleven nature-books, as a group, stand alone and at the head of the long list of books written about the out-of-doors since the days of the *Historia Animalium*, and the mediæval "Fables" and "Beasteries."

These eleven volumes are Mr. Burroughs's characteristic, his important work. His other books are eminently worth while: there is reverent, honest thinking in his religious essays, a creedless but an absolute and joyous faith; there is simple and exquisite feeling in his poems; close analysis and an unmitigatedness, wholly Whitmanesque, in his interpretation of Whitman; and

no saner, happier criticism anywhere than in his "Literary Values." There are many other excellent critics, however, many poets and religious writers, many other excellent nature-writers, too; but is there any other who has written so much upon the ways of nature as they parallel and cross the ways of men, upon so great a variety of nature's forms and expressions, and done it with such abiding love, with such truth and charm?

Yet such a comparison is beyond proof, except in the least of the literary values — mere quantity; and it may be with literature as with merchandise: the larger the cask the greater the tare. Charm? Is not charm that which *I* chance to like, or *you* chance to like? Others have written of nature with as much love and truth as has Mr. Burroughs, and each with his own peculiar charm: Audubon, with the spell of wild places and the thrill of fresh wonder; Traherne, with the ecstasy of the religious mystic; Gilbert White, with the sweetness of the evening and the morning; Thoreau, with the heat of noonday; Jefferies, with just a touch of twilight shadowing all his pages. We want them severally as they are; Mr. Burroughs as he is, neither wandering

"lonely as a cloud" in search of poems, nor skulking in the sedges along the banks of the Guaso Nyero looking for lions. We want him at Slabsides, near his celery fields. And whatever the literary quality of our other nature-writers, no one of them has come any nearer than Mr. Burroughs to that difficult ideal, — a union of thought and form, no more to be separated than the heart and the bark of a live tree.

Take Mr. Burroughs's work as a whole, and it is beyond dispute the most complete, the most revealing, of all our outdoor literature. His pages lie open like the surface of a pond, sensitive to every wind, or calm as the sky, holding the clouds and the distant blue, and the dragon-fly, stiff-winged and pinned to the golden knob of a spatter-dock.

All outdoor existence, all outdoor phenomena, are deeply interesting to him. There is scarcely a form of outdoor life, scarcely a piece of landscape, or natural occurrence characteristic of the Eastern States, which has not been dealt with suggestively in his pages: the rabbit under his porch, the paleozoic pebble along his path, the salt breeze borne inland by the Hudson, the

whirl of a snowstorm, the work of the honey-bees, the procession of the seasons over Slabsides, even the abundant soil out of which he and his grapes grow and which, "incorruptible and undefiled," he calls divine.

He devotes an entire chapter to the bluebird, a chapter to the fox, one to the apple, another to the wild strawberry. The individual, the particular thing, is always of particular interest to him. But so is its habitat, the whole of its environment. He sees the gem, not cut and set in a ring, but rough in the mine, where it glitters on the hand of nature, and glitters all the more that it is worn in the dark. Naturally Mr. Burroughs has written much about the birds; yet he is not an ornithologist. His theme has not been this or that, but nature in its totality, as it is held within the circle of his horizon, as it surrounds, supports, and quickens him.

That nature does support and quicken the spiritual of him, no less than the physical, is the inspiration of his writing and the final comment it requires. Whether the universe was shaped from chaos with man as its end, is a question of real concern to Mr. Burroughs, but of less con-

cern to him than the problem of shaping himself to the universe, of living as long as he can upon a world so perfectly adapted to life, if only one be physically and spiritually adaptable. To take the earth as one finds it, to plant one's self in it, to plant one's roof-tree in it, to till it, to understand it and the laws which govern it, and the Perfection which created it, and to love it all, — this is the heart of Mr. Burroughs's religion, the pith of his philosophy, the conclusion of his books.

But if a perfect place for the fit, how hard a place is this world for the lazy, the ignorant, the stubborn, the weak, the physically and spiritually ill! So hard that a torpid liver is almost a mortal handicap, the stars in their courses fighting against the bilious to defeat them, to drive them to take exercise, to a copious drinking of water, to a knowledge of burdock and calomel — to obedience and understanding.

Underlying all of Mr. Burroughs's thought and feeling, framing every one of his books, is a deep sense of the perfection of nature, the sharing of which is physical life, the understanding of which is spiritual life, is knowledge of God himself,

in some part of His perfection. "I cannot tell what the simple apparition of the earth and sky mean to me; I think that at rare intervals one sees that they have an immense spiritual meaning, altogether unspeakable, and that they are the great helps, after all." How the world was made — its geology, its biology — is the great question, for its answer is poetry and religion and life itself. Mr. Burroughs is serenely sure as to who made the world; the theological speculation as to *why* it was made, he answers by growing small fruits on it, living upon it, writing about it.

Temperamentally Mr. Burroughs is an optimist, as vocationally he is a writer, and avocationally a vine-dresser. He plants and expects to gather — grapes from his grape-vines, books from his book-vines, years, satisfactions, sorrows, joys, all that is due him.

> The waters know their own and draw
> The brook that springs in yonder heights;
> So flows the good with equal law
> Unto the soul of pure delights.

And what is it that is due him? Everything; everything essential; as everything essential is due the pine tree, the prairie, the very planet. Is

not this earth a star? Are not the prairie, the pine tree, and man the dust of stars? each a part of the other? all parts of one whole — a universe, round, rolling, without beginning, without end, without flaw, without lack, a universe self-sustained, perfect?

> I stay my haste, I make delays,
> For what avails this eager pace?
> I stand amid the eternal ways,
> And what is mine shall know my face.

Mr. Burroughs came naturally by such a view of nature and its consequent optimism. It is due partly to his having been born and brought up on a farm where he had what was due him from the start. Such birth and bringing-up is the natural right of every boy. To know and to do the primitive, the elemental; to go barefoot, to drive the cows, to fish, and to go to school with not too many books but with "plenty of real things" — these are nominated in every boy's bond.

> Serene, I fold my hands and wait,

is the poem of a childhood on the farm, and the poem of a manhood on the farm, in spite of the critic who says: —

"We have never ceased to wonder that this friend of the birds, this kindly interpreter of nature in all her moods, was born and brought up on a farm; it was in that smiling country watered by the east branch of the Delaware. No man, as a rule, knows less about the colors, songs, and habits of birds, and is more indifferent to natural scenery than the man born to the soil, who delves in it and breathes its odors. Contact with it and laborious days seem to deaden his faculties of observation and deprive him of all sympathy with nature." During the days when the deadening might have occurred, Mr. Burroughs was teaching school. Then he became a United States bank examiner, and only after that returned to the country where he still lives. He is now in his seventies, and coming full of years, and fuller and fuller of books, as his vines are full of years, and fuller and fuller of grapes.

Could it be otherwise? If men and grapes are of the same divine dust, should they not grow according to the same divine laws? Here in the vineyard along the Hudson, Mr. Burroughs planted himself in planting his vines, and every trellis that he set has become his own sup-

port and stay. The very clearing of the land for his vineyard was a preparation of himself physically and morally for a more fruitful life.

"Before the snow was off in March," he says in "Literary Values," "we set to work under-draining the moist and springy places. My health and spirits improved daily. I seemed to be underdraining my own life and carrying off the stagnant water, as well as that of the land." And so he was. There are other means of doing it — taking drugs, playing golf, walking the streets; but surely the advantages and the poetry are all in favor of the vineyard. And how much fitter a place the vineyard to mellow and ripen life, than a city roof of tarry pebbles and tin!

Though necessarily personal and subjective, Mr. Burroughs's writing is entirely free from self-exploitation and confession. There are pages scattered here and there dealing briefly and frankly with his own natural history, but our thanks are due to Mr. Burroughs that he never made a business of watching himself. Once he was inveigled by a magazine editor into doing "An Egotistical Chapter," wherein we find him as a boy of sixteen reading essays, and capable at that age

of feeding for a whole year upon Dr. Johnson! Then we find him reading Whipple's essays, and the early outdoor papers of Higginson; and later, at twenty-three, settling down with Emerson's essays, and getting one of his own into the "Atlantic Monthly."

How early his own began to come to him!

That first essay in the "Atlantic" was followed by a number of outdoor sketches in the New York "Leader" — written, Mr. Burroughs says, "mainly to break the spell of Emerson's influence and get upon ground of my own." He succeeded in both purposes; and a large and exceedingly fertile piece of ground it proved to be, too, this which he got upon! Already the young writer had chosen his field and his crop. The out-of-doors has been largely his literary material, as the essay has been largely his literary form, ever since. He has done other things — volumes of literary studies and criticisms; but his theme from first to last has been the Great Book of Nature, a page of which, here and there, he has tried to read to us.

Mr. Burroughs's work, in outdoor literature, is a distinct species, with new and well-marked

characteristics. He is the nature-writer, to be distinguished from the naturalist in Gilbert White, the mystic in Traherne, the philosopher in Emerson, the preacher, poet, egotist in Thoreau, the humorist in Charles Dudley Warner. As we now know the nature-writer we come upon him for the first time in Mr. Burroughs. Such credit might have gone to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, had he not been something else before he was a lover of nature — of letters first, then of flowers, carrying his library into the fields; whereas Mr. Burroughs brings the fields into the library. The essay whose matter is nature, whose moral is human, whose manner is strictly literary, belongs to Mr. Burroughs. His work is distinguished by this threefold and *even* emphasis. In almost every other of our early outdoor writers either the naturalist or the moralist or the stylist holds the pen.

Early or late, this or that, good outdoor writing must be marked, first, by fidelity to fact; and, secondly, by sincerity of expression. Like qualities mark all good literature; but they are themselves the *very* literature of nature. When we take up a nature-book we ask (and it was Mr.

Burroughs who taught us to ask), "Is the record true? Is the writing honest?"

In these eleven volumes by Mr. Burroughs there are many observations, and it is more than likely that some of them may be wrong, but it is not possible that any of them could be mixed with observations that Mr. Burroughs knows he never made. If Mr. Burroughs has written a line of sham natural history, which line is it? In a preface to "Wake-Robin," the author says his readers have sometimes complained that they do not see the things which he sees in the woods; but I doubt if there ever was a reader who suspected Mr. Burroughs of not seeing the things.

His reply to these complaints is significant, being in no manner a defense, but an exquisite explanation, instead, of the difference between the nature which anybody may see in the woods and the nature that every individual writer, because he is a writer, and an individual, must put into his book: a difference like that between the sweet-water gathered by the bee from the flowers and the drop of acid-stung honey deposited by the bee in the comb. The sweet-water undergoes a chemical change in being brought to the hive, as

the wild nature undergoes a literary change — by the addition of the writer's self to the nature, while with the sweet-water it is by the addition of the bee.

One must be able to walk to an editorial office and back, and all the way walk humbly with his theme, as Mr. Burroughs ever does — not entirely forgetful of himself, nor of me (because he has invited me along); but I must be quiet and not disturb the fishing — if we go by way of a trout-stream.

True to the facts, Mr. Burroughs is a great deal more than scientific, for he loves the things — the birds, hills, seasons — as well as the truths about them; and true to himself, he is not by any means a simple countryman who has never seen the city, a natural idyl, who lisps in "Atlantic" essays, because the essays come. He is fully aware of the thing he wants to do, and by his own confession has a due amount of trouble shaping his raw material into finished literary form. He is quite in another class from the authors of "The Complete Angler" and "New England's Rarities Discovered." In Isaak Walton, to quote Leslie Stephen, "*a happy combination of circumstances* has

provided us with a true country idyl, fresh and racy from the soil, not consciously constructed by the most skillful artistic hand."

Now the skillful artistic hand is everywhere seen in Mr. Burroughs. What writer in these days could expect happy combinations of circumstances in sufficient numbers for eleven volumes? Albeit a stone house, in a vineyard by the Hudson, seems a very happy combination, indeed!

But being an idyl, when you come to think of it, is not the result of a happy combination of circumstances, but rather of stars — of horoscope. You are born an idyl or you are not, and where and when you live has nothing to do with it.

Who would look for a true country idyl today in the city of Philadelphia? Yet one came out of there yesterday, and lies here open before me, on the table. It is a slender volume, called "With the Birds, An Affectionate Study," by Caroline Eliza Hyde. The author is discussing the general subject of nomenclature and animal distribution, and says: —

"When the Deluge covered the then known face of the earth, the birds were drowned with

every other living thing, except those that Noah, commanded by God, took two by two into the Ark.

"When I reflect deeply and earnestly about the Ark, as every one should, thoughts crowd my mind with an irresistible force."

[And they crowd my mind, too.]

"Noah and his family had preserved the names of the birds given them by Adam. This is assured, for Noah sent a raven and a dove out to see if the waters had abated, and we have birds of that name now. Nothing was known of our part of the globe, so these birds must have remained in the Holy Land for centuries. We do not hear of them until America was discovered. . . .

"Bats come from Sur. They are very black mouse-like birds, and disagreeable. . . . The bobolink is not mentioned in the Bible, but it is doubtless a primitive bird. The cock that crows too early in the morning . . . can hardly be classed with the song-birds. The name of the humming-bird is not mentioned in the Bible, but as there is nothing new under the sun, he is probably a primitive bird."

Mr. Burroughs will agree that the humming-

bird is probably a primitive bird; and also that this is a true idyl, and that he could not write a true idyl if he tried. No one could write like that by trying. And what has any happy combination of circumstances to do with it? No, a book essentially is only a personality in type, and he who would not be frustrated of his hope to write a true idyl must himself be born a true idyl. A fine Miltonic saying!

Mr. Burroughs is not an idyl, but an essayist, with a love for books only second to his love for nature; a watcher in the woods, a tiller of the soil, a reader, critic, thinker, poet, whose chief business these fifty years has been the interpretation of the out-of-doors.

Upon him as interpreter and observer, his recent books, "Ways of Nature" and "Leaf and Tendril," are an interesting comment.

Truth does not always make good literature, not when it is stranger than fiction, as it often is, and the writer who sticks to the truth of nature must sometimes do it at the cost of purely literary ends. Have I sacrificed truth to literature? asks Mr. Burroughs of his books. Have I seen in nature the things that are there, or the strange

man-things, the "winged creeping things which have four feet," and which were an abomination to the ancient Hebrews, but which the readers of modern nature-writing do greedily devour — are these the things I have seen? And for an answer he sets about a reëxamination of all he has written, from "Wake-Robin" to "Far and Near," hoping "that the result of the discussion or threshing will not be to make the reader love the animals less, but rather to love the truth more."

But the result, as embodied in "Ways of Nature" and in "Leaf and Tendril," is quite the opposite, I fear; for these two volumes are more scientific in tone than any of his other work; and it is the mission, not of science, but of literature, to quicken our love for animals, even for truth. Science only adds to the truth. Yet here, in spite of himself, Mr. Burroughs is more the writer, more the interpreter, than the investigator. He is constantly forgetting his scientific thesis, as, for instance, in the account of his neighbor's errant cow. He succeeds finally, however, in reducing her fairly well to a mechanical piece of beef acting to vegetable stimuli upon a nerve ganglion

located somewhere in the region between her horns and her tail.

Now, all this is valuable, and the use made of it is laudable, but would we not rather have the account than the cow, especially from Mr. Burroughs? Certainly, because to us it is the *account* that he has come to stand for. And so, if we do not love his scientific animals more, and his scientific findings more, we shall, I think, love all his other books more; for we see now that, from the beginning, he has regarded the facts of nature as the solid substance of his books, to be kept as free from fancy and from false report, as his interpretation of them is to be kept free from all exaggeration and cant.

Here, then, are eleven volumes of honest seeing, honest feeling, honest reporting. Such honesty of itself may not make good nature-literature, but without such honesty there can be no good nature-literature.

Nature-literature is not less than the truth, but more; how much more, Mr. Burroughs himself suggests to us in a passage about his literary habits.

"For my part," he says, "I can never inter-

view nature in the reporter fashion. I must camp and tramp with her to get any good, and what I get I absorb through my emotions rather than consciously gather through my intellect. . . . An experience must lie in my mind a certain time before I can put it upon paper—say from three to six months. If there is anything in it, it will ripen and mellow by that time. I rarely take any notes, and I have a very poor memory, but rely upon the affinity of my mind for a certain order of truths or observations. What is mine will stick to me, and what is not will drop off. We who write about nature pick out, I suspect, only the rare moments when we have had glimpses of her, and make much of them. Our lives are dull, our minds crusted over with rubbish like those of other people. Then writing about nature, or about most other subjects, is an expansive process; we are under the law of evolution; we grow the germ into the tree; a little original observation goes a good way." For "when you go to nature, bring us good science or else good literature, and not a mere inventory of what you have seen. One demonstrates, the other interprets."

Careful as Mr. Burroughs has been with his facts, so careful as often to bring us excellent science, he yet has left us no inventory of the out-of-doors. His work is literature; he is not a demonstrator, but an interpreter, an expositor who is true to the text and true to the whole of the context.

Our pleasure in Mr. Burroughs as an interpreter comes as much from his wholesome good sense, from his balance and sanity, I think, as from the assurance of his sincerity. Free from pose and cant and deception, he is free also from bias and strain. There is something ordinary, normal, reasonable, companionable, about him; an even tenor to all his ways, a deliberateness, naturalness to all his paths, as if they might have been made originally by the cows. So they were.

If Mr. Burroughs were to start from my door for a tramp over these small Hingham hills he would cross the trout-brook by my neighbor's stone bridge, and nibbling a spear of peppermint on the way, would follow the lane and the cow-paths across the pasture. Thoreau would pick out the deepest hole in the brook and try to swim across; he would leap the stone walls of

the lane, cut a bee-line through the pasture, and drop, for his first look at the landscape, to the bottom of the pit in the seam-face granite quarry. Here he would pull out his note-book and a gnarly wild apple from his pocket, and intensely, critically, chemically, devouring said apple, make note in the book that the apples of Eden were flat, the apples of Sodom bitter, but this wild, tough, wretched, impossible apple of the Hingham hills united all ambrosial essences in its striking odor of squash-bugs.

Mr. Burroughs takes us along with him. Thoreau comes upon us in the woods — jumps out at us from behind some bush, with a "*Scat!*" Burroughs brings us home in time for tea; Thoreau leaves us tangled up in the briars.

It won't hurt us to be jumped at now and then and told to "*scat!*" It won't hurt us to be digged by the briars. It is good for us, otherwise we might forget that *we* are beneath our clothes. It is good for us and highly diverting, but highly irritating too.

For my part, when I take up an outdoor book I am glad if there is quiet in it, and fragrance, and something of the saneness and sweet-

ness of the sky. Not that I always want sweet skies. It is ninety-eight degrees in the shade, and three weeks since there fell a drop of rain. I could sing like a robin for a sizzling, crackling thunder-shower — less for the sizzling and crackling than for the shower. Thoreau is a succession of showers — "tempests"; his pages are sheet-lightning, electrifying, purifying, illuminating, but not altogether conducive to peace. There is a clear sky to most of Mr. Burroughs's pages, a rural landscape, wide, gently rolling, with cattle standing here and there beneath the trees.

Mr. Burroughs's natural history is entirely natural, his philosophy entirely reasonable, his religion and ethics very much of the kind we wish our minister and our neighbor might possess; and his manner of writing is so unaffected that we feel we could write in such a manner ourselves. Only we cannot.

Since the time he can be said to have "led" a life, Mr. Burroughs has led a literary life; that is to say, nothing has been allowed to interfere with his writing; yet the writing has not been allowed to interfere with a quiet successful business, — with his raising of grapes.

He has a study and a vineyard.

Not many men ought to live by the pen alone. A steady diet of inspiration and words is hard on the literary health. The writing should be varied with some good wholesome work, actual hard work for the hands; not so much work, perhaps, as one would find in an eighteen-acre vineyard; yet Mr. Burroughs's eighteen acres have certainly proved no check — rather, indeed, a stimulus — to his writing. He seems to have gathered a volume out of every acre; and he seems to have put a good acre into every volume. "Fresh Fields" is the name of one of the volumes, "Leaf and Tendril" of another; but the freshness of his fields, the leaves and the tendrils of his vineyard, enter into them all. The grapes of the vineyard are in them also.

Here is a growth of books out of the soil, books that have been trimmed, trained, sprayed, and kept free from rot. Such books may not be altogether according to the public taste; they will keep, however, until the public acquires a better taste. Sound, ripe, fresh, early and late, a full crop! Has the vineyard anything to do with it?

It is not every farmer who should go to writing, nor every writer who should go to farming; but there is a mighty waste of academic literature, of premature, precocious, lily-handed literature, of chicken-licken literature, because the writers do not know a spade when they see one, would not call it a spade if they knew. Those writers need to do less writing and more farming, more real work with their soft hands in partnership with the elemental forces of nature, or in comradeship with average elemental men — the only species extant of the quality to make writing worth while.

Mr. Burroughs has had this labor, this partnership, this comradeship. His writing is seasoned and sane. It is ripe, and yet as fresh as green corn with the dew in the silk. You have eaten corn on the cob just from the stalk and steamed in its own husk? Green corn that *is* corn, that has all its milk and sugar and flavor, is corn on the cob, and in the husk, — is cob and kernel and husk, — not a stripped ear that is cooked into the kitchen air.

Literature is too often stripped of its human husk, and cut from its human cob: the man

gone, the writer left; the substance gone, the style left — corn that tastes as much like corn as it tastes like puffed rice, — which tastes like nothing at all. There is the sweetness of the husk, the flavor of the cob, the substance of the uncut corn to Mr. Burroughs.

There is no lack of cob and husk to Thoreau, of shell and hull, one should say, for he is more like a green walnut than an ear of green corn. Thoreau is very human, a whole man; but he is almost as much a tree, and a mountain, and a pond, and a spell of weather, and a state of morals. He is the author of "Walden," and nobody else in the world is that; he is a lover of nature, as ardent a lover as ever eloped with her; he is a lover of men, too, loving them with an intensity that hates them bag and baggage; he is poetical, prophetic, paradoxical, and utterly impossible.

But he knew it. Born in Concord, under the transcendental stars, at a time when Delphic sayings and philosophy, romance and poetry ran wild in the gardens where Bouncing-Bet and Wayward Charlie now run wild, Thoreau knew that he was touched, and that all his neighbors were

touched, and sought asylum at Walden. But Walden was not distant enough. If Mr. Burroughs in Roxbury, New York, found it necessary to take to the woods in order to escape from Emerson, then Thoreau should have gone to Chicago, or to Xamiltapec.

It is the strain, in Thoreau, that wearies us; his sweating among the stumps and woodchucks, for a bean crop netting him eight dollars, seventy-one and one half cents. But such beans! Beans with minds and souls! Yet, for baking, plain beans are better than these transcendental beans, because your transcendental beans are always baked without pork. A family man, however, cannot contemplate that piddling patch with any patience, even though he have a taste for literature as real as his taste for beans. It is better to watch Mr. Burroughs pruning his grape-vines for a crop to net him one thousand, three hundred and twenty-five dollars, and *no* cents, and no half-cents. Here are eighteen acres to be cultivated, whose fruit is to be picked, shipped, and sold in the New York markets at a profit — a profit plainly felt in Mr. Burroughs's books.

The most worthy qualities of good writing are

those least noticeable, — negative qualities of honesty, directness, sincerity, euphony; noticeable only by their absence. Yet in Mr. Burroughs they amount to a positive charm. Indeed, are not these same negative qualities the very substance of good style? Such style as is had by a pair of pruning-shears, as is embodied in the exquisite lines of a flying swallow — the style that is perfect, purposeful adaptability?

But there is more than efficiency to Mr. Burroughs's style; there are strengths and graces existing in and for themselves. Here is a naturalist who has studied the art of writing. "What little merit my style has," he declares, "is the result of much study and discipline." And whose style, if it be style at all, is not the result of much study and discipline. Flourish, fine-writing, wordiness, obscurity, and cant are exorcised in no other way; and as for the "limpidness, sweetness, freshness," which Mr. Burroughs says should characterize outdoor writing, and which do characterize his writing, how else than by study and discipline shall they be obtained?

Outdoor literature, no less than other types of literature, is both form and matter; the two

are mutually dependent, inseparably one; but the writer is most faithful to the form when he is most careful of the matter. It makes a vast difference whether his interest is absorbed by what he has to say, or by the possible ways he may say it. If Mr. Burroughs writes in his shirt-sleeves, as a recent critic says he does, it is because he goes about his writing as he goes about his vine-yarding — for grapes, for thoughts, and not to see how pretty he can make a paragraph look, or into what fantastic form he can train a vine. The vine is lovely in itself, — if it bear fruit.

And so is language. Take Mr. Burroughs's manner in any of its moods: its store of single, sufficient words, for instance, especially the homely, rugged words and idioms, and the flavor they give, is second to the work they do; or take his use of figures — when he speaks of De Quincey's "discursive, roundabout style, herding his thoughts as a collie dog herds sheep," — and unexpected, vivid, apt as they are, they are even more effective. One is often caught up by the poetry of these essays and borne aloft, but never on a gale of words; the lift and sweep are genuine emotion and thought.

As an essayist, — as a nature-writer I ought to say, — Mr. Burroughs's literary care is perhaps nowhere so plainly seen as in the simple architecture of his essay plans, in their balance and finish, a quality that distinguishes him from others of the craft, and that neither gift nor chance could so invariably supply. The common fault of outdoor books is the catalogue — raw data, notes. There are paragraphs of notes in Mr. Burroughs, volumes of them in Thoreau. The average nature-writer sees not too much of nature, but knows all too little of literary values; he sees everything, gets a meaning out of nothing; writes it all down; and gives us what he sees, which is precisely what everybody may see; whereas, we want also what he thinks and feels. Some of our present writers do nothing but feel and divine and fathom — the animal psychologists, whatever they are. The bulk of nature-writing, however, is journalistic, done on the spot, into a note-book, as were the journals of Thoreau — fragmentary, yet with Thoreau often exquisite fragments — bits of old stained glass, unleaded, and lacking unity and design.

No such fault can be found with Mr. Bur-

roughs. He goes pencilless into the woods, and waits before writing until his return home, until time has elapsed for the multitudinous details of the trip to blur and blend, leaving only the dominant facts and impressions for his pen. Every part of his work is of selected stock, as free from knots and seams and sap-wood as a piece of old-growth pine. There is plan, proportion, integrity to his essays — the naturalist living faithfully up to a sensitive literary conscience.

Mr. Burroughs is a good but not a great naturalist, as Audubon and Gray were great naturalists. His claim (and Audubon's in part) upon us is literary. He has been a watcher in the woods; has made a few pleasant excursions into the primeval wilderness, leaving his gun at home, and his camera, too, thank Heaven! He has broken out no new trail, discovered no new animal, no new thing. But he has seen all the old, uncommon things, has seen them oftener, has watched them longer, through more seasons, than any other writer of our out-of-doors; and though he has discovered no new thing, yet he has made discoveries, volumes of them, — contributions largely to our stock of literature, and to our store

of love for the earth, and to our joy in living upon it. He has turned a little of the universe into literature; has translated a portion of the earth into human language; has restored to us our garden here eastward in Eden — apple tree and all.

For a real taste of fruity literature, try Mr. Burroughs's chapter on "The Apple." Try Thoreau's, too, — if you are partial to squash-bugs. There are chapters in Mr. Burroughs, such as "Is it going to Rain?" "A River View," "A Snow-Storm," which seem to me as perfect, in their way, as anything that has ever been done — single, simple, beautiful in form, and deeply significant; the storm being a piece of fine description, of whirling snow across a geologic landscape, distant, and as dark as eternity; the whole wintry picture lighted and warmed at the end by a glowing touch of human life: —

"We love the sight of the brown and ruddy earth; it is the color of life, while a snow-covered plain is the face of death; yet snow is but the mark of life-giving rain; it, too, is the friend of man — the tender, sculpturesque, immaculate, warming, fertilizing snow."

There are many texts in these eleven volumes, many themes; and in them all there is one real message: that this is a good world to live in; that these are good men and women to live with; that life is good, here and now, and altogether worth living.

VII

HUNTING THE SNOW

HUNTING THE SNOW

THE hunt began at the hen-yard gate, where we saw tracks in the thin, new snow that led us up the ridge, and along its narrow back, to a hollow stump. Here the hunt began in earnest, for not until that trail of close, double, nail-pointed prints went under the stump were the three small boys convinced that we were tracking a skunk and not a cat.

This creature had moved leisurely. That you could tell by the closeness of the prints. Wide-apart tracks in the snow mean hurry. Now a cat, going as slowly as this creature went, would have put down her dainty feet almost in single line, and would have left round, cushion-marked holes in the snow, not triangular, nail-pointed prints like these. Cats do not venture into holes under stumps, either.

We had bagged our first quarry! No, no! We had not pulled that wood pussy out of his hole and put him into our game-bag. We did

not want to do that. We really carried no bag; and if we had, we should not have put the wood pussy in it, for we were hunting tracks, not the animals, and "bagging our quarry" meant trailing a creature to its den, or following its track until we had discovered something it had done, or what its business was, and why it was out. We were on the snow for animal *facts*, not animal pelts.

We were elated with our luck, for this stump was not five minutes by the steep ridge path from the hen-yard. And here, standing on the stump, we were only sixty minutes away from Boston Common by the automobile, driving no faster than the law allows. So we were not hunting in a wilderness, but just outside our dooryard and almost within the borders of a great city.

And that is the interesting fact of our morning hunt. No one but a lover of the woods and a careful walker on the snow would believe that here in the midst of hay-fields, in sight of the smoke of city factories, so many of the original wild wood-folk still live and travel their night paths undisturbed.

Still, this is a rather rough bit of country,

broken, ledgy, boulder-strewn, which accounts for the swamps and woody hills that alternate with small towns and cultivated fields all the way to the Blue Hill Reservation, fifteen miles to the westward. This whole region, this dooryard of Boston, is one of Nature's own reservations, a preserve that she has kept for her small and humble folk, who are just as dear to her as we are, but whom we have driven, except in such small places as these, quite off the earth.

Here, however, they are still at home, as this hole of the skunk's under the stump proved. But there was more proof. As we topped the ridge on the trail of the skunk, we crossed another trail, made up of bunches of four prints, — two long and broad, two small and roundish, — spaced about a yard apart.

A hundred times, the winter before, we had tried that trail in the hope of finding the form or the burrow of its maker, the great Northern hare, but it crossed and turned and doubled, and always led us into a tangle, out of which we never got a clue.

As this was the first tracking snow of the winter, we were relieved to see the strong prints of

our cunning neighbor again, for what with the foxes and the hunters, we were afraid it might have fared ill with him. But here he was, with four good legs under him; and after bagging our skunk, we returned to pick up the hare's trail, to try our luck once more.

We brought him in long, leisurely leaps down the ridge, out into our mowing field, and over to the birches below the house. Here he had capered about in the snow, had stood up on his haunches and gnawed the bark from off a green oak sucker two and a half feet from the ground. This, doubtless, was pretty near his length, stretched out — an interesting item; not exact to the inch, perhaps, but close enough for us; and much more fascinating, guessed at by such a rule, than if measured dead, with scientific accuracy.

Nor was this all, for up the foot-path through the birches came the marks of two dogs. They joined the marks of the hare. And then, back along the edge of the woods to the bushy ridge, we saw a pretty race.

It was all in our imaginations, all done for us by those long-flinging footprints in the snow. But we saw it all — the white hare, the yelling

hounds, nip and tuck, in a burst of speed across the open field that left a gap in the wind behind.

It had all come as a surprise. The hounds had climbed the hill on the scent of a fox, and had "jumped" the hare unexpectedly. But just such a jump of fear is what a hare's magnificent legs were intended for.

They carried him a clear twelve feet in some of the longest leaps for the ridge, and they carried him to safety, so far as we could read the snow. In the medley of hare-and-hound tracks on the ridge there was no sign of a tragedy. He had escaped again — but how and where we have still to learn.

We had bagged our hare, — yet still we have him to bag, — and taking up the trail of one of the dogs, we continued our hunt.

One of the joys of this snow-walking is having a definite road or trail blazed for you by knowing, purposeful feet. You do not have to blunder ahead, breaking your way into this wilderness world, trusting luck to bring you somewhere. The wild animal or the dog goes this way, and not that, for a reason. You are following that

reason all along; you are pack-fellow to the hound; you hunt with him.

Here the hound had thrust his muzzle into a snow-capped pile of slashings, had gone clear round the pile, then continued on his way. But we stopped, for out of the pile, in a single, direct line, ran a number of mice-prints, going and coming. A dozen white-footed mice might have traveled that road since the day before, when the snow had ceased falling.

We entered the tiny road (for in this kind of hunting a mouse is as good as a mink), and found ourselves descending the woods toward the garden-patch below. Halfway down we came to a great red oak, into a hole at the base of which, as into the portal of some mighty castle, ran the road of the mice. That was the end of it. There was not a single straying footprint beyond the tree.

I reached in as far as my arm would go, and drew out a fistful of pop-corn cobs. So here was part of my scanty crop! I pushed in again, and gathered up a bunch of chestnut shells, hickory-nuts, and several neatly rifled hazelnuts. This was story enough. There was a nest, or family,

of mice living under the slashing pile, who for some good reason kept their stores here in the recesses of this ancient red oak. Or was this some squirrel's barn being pilfered by the mice, as my barn is the year round? It was not all plain. But this question, this constant riddle of the woods, — small, indeed, in the case of the mouse, and involving no great fate in its solution, — is part of our constant joy in the woods. Life is always new, always strange, always fascinating.

It has all been studied and classified according to species. Any one knowing the woods at all would know that these were mice-tracks, the tracks of the white-footed mouse, even, and not the tracks of the jumping mouse, the house mouse, or the meadow mouse. But what is the whole small story of these prints? What purpose, intention, feeling do they spell? What and why? — a hundred times!

But the scientific books are dumb. Indeed, they do not consider such questions worth answering, just as under the species *Mus* they make no record of the fact that

The present only toucheth thee.

But that is a poem. Burns discovered that — Burns, the farmer! The woods and fields are poem-full, and it is largely because we do not know, and never can know, just all that the tiny snow-prints of a wood-mouse may mean, nor understand just what

root and all, and all in all,

the humblest flower is.

The pop-corn cobs, however, were a known quantity, a tangible fact, and falling in with a gray squirrel's track not far from the red oak, we went on, our game-bag heavier, our hearts lighter at the thought that we, by the sweat of our brow, had contributed a few ears of corn to the comfort of this snowy winter world.

The squirrel's track wound up and down the hillside, wove in and out and round and round, hitting every possible tree, as if the only road for a squirrel was one that looped and doubled and tied up every stump and zigzagged into every tree trunk in the woods.

But all this maze was no ordinary journey. The squirrel had not run this coil of a road for breakfast, because when he travels, say, for distant nuts, he goes as directly as you go to your

school or office; but he goes not by streets, but by trees, never crossing more of the open in a single rush than the space between him and the nearest tree that will take him on his way.

What interested us here in the woods was the fact that a second series of tracks just like the first, only about half as large, dogged the larger tracks persistently, leaping tree for tree, and landing track for track with astonishing accuracy — tracks which, had they not been evidently those of a smaller squirrel, would have read to us most menacingly.

As this was the mating season for squirrels, I suggested that it might have been a kind of Atalanta's race here in the woods. But why did so little a squirrel want to marry one so big? They would not look well together, was the answer of the small boys. They thought it much more likely that Father Squirrel had been playing wood-tag with one of his children.

Then, suddenly, as sometimes happens in the woods, the true meaning of the signs was literally hurled at us, for down the hill, squealing and panting, rushed a large male gray squirrel, with a red squirrel like a shadow, like a weasel, at his heels.

For just an instant I thought it was a weasel, so swift and silent and gliding were its movements, so set and cruel seemed its expression, so sure, so inevitable its victory.

Whether it ever caught the gray squirrel or not, and what it would have done had it caught the big fellow, I do not know. But I have seen the chase often — the gray squirrel put to the last extremity with fright and fatigue, the red squirrel an avenging, inexorable fate behind. They tore round and round us, then up over the hill, and disappeared.

One of the rarest prints for most snow-hunters nowadays, but one of the commonest hereabouts, is the quick, sharp track of the fox. In the spring particularly, when my fancy young chickens are turned out to pasture, I have spells of fearing that the fox will never be exterminated here in this untillable but beautiful chicken country. In the winter, however, when I see Reynard's trail across my lawn, when I hear the music of the baying hounds, and catch a glimpse of the white-tipped brush swinging serenely in advance of the coming pack, I cannot but admire the capable, cunning rascal, cannot but be glad for him, and marvel

at him, so resourceful, so superior to his almost impossible conditions, his almost innumerable foes.

We started across the meadow on his trail, but found it leading so straightaway for the ledges, and so continuously blotted out by the passing of the pack, that, striking the wallowy path of a muskrat in the middle of the meadow, we took up the new scent to see what the shuffling, cowering water-rat wanted from across the snow.

A man is known by the company he keeps, by the way he wears his hat, by the manner of his laugh; but among the wild animals nothing tells more of character than their manner of moving. You can read animal character as easily in the snow as you can read act and direction.

The timidity, the indecision, the lack of purpose, the restless, meaningless curiosity of this muskrat were evident from the first in the log-like, the starting, stopping, returning, going-on track he had ploughed out in the thin snow.

He did not know where he was going or what he was going for; he knew only that he insisted upon going back, but all the while kept going

on; that he wanted to go to the right or to the left, yet kept moving straight ahead.

We came to a big wallow in the snow, where, in sudden fear, he had had a fit at the thought of something that might not have happened to him had he stayed at home. Every foot of the trail read, "He would if he could; but if he would n't, how could he?"

We followed him on, across a dozen other trails, for it is not every winter night that the muskrat's feet get the better of his head, and, willy-nilly, take him abroad. Strange and fatal weakness! He goes and cannot stop.

Along the stone wall of the meadow we tracked him, across the highroad, over our garden, into the orchard, up the woody hill to the yard, back down the hill to the orchard, out into the garden, and back toward the orchard again; and here, on a knoll just in the edge of the scanty, skeleton shadow where the moon fell through the trees, we lost him.

Two mighty wings had touched the snow lightly here, and the lumbering trail had vanished as into the air.

Close and mysterious the silent wings hang

poised indoors and out. Laughter and tears are companions. Comedy begins, but tragedy often ends the trail. Yet the sum of life indoors and out is peace, gladness, and fulfillment.

VIII

THE CLAM FARM

THE CLAM FARM:

A CASE OF CONSERVATION

UR hunger for clams and their present scarcity have not been the chief factors in the new national movement for the conservation of our natural resources; nor are the soaring prices of pork and lumber and wheat immediate causes, although they have served to give point and application to the movement. Ours is still a lavishly rich country. We have long had a greed for land, but we have not felt a pang yet of the Old World's land-hunger. Thousands of acres, the stay for thousands of human lives, are still lying as waste places on the very borders of our eastern cities. There is plenty of land yet, plenty of lumber, plenty of food, but there is a very great and growing scarcity of clams.

Of course the clam might vanish utterly from the earth and be forgotten; our memory of its juicy, salty, sea-fat flavor might vanish with it;

and we, ignorant of our loss, be none the poorer. We should live on, — the eyeless fish in the Mammoth Cave live on, — but life, nevertheless, would not be so well worth living. For it would be flatter, with less of wave-wet freshness and briny gusto. No kitchen-mixed seasoning can supply the wild, natural flavors of life; no factory-made sensations the joy of being the normal, elemental, primitive animal that we are.

The clam is one of the natural flavors of life, and no longer ago than when I was a freshman was considered one of life's necessities. Part of the ceremony of my admission to college was a clambake down the Providence River — such a clambake as never was down any other river, and as never shall be again down the Providence River, unless the Rhode Island clam-diggers take up their barren flats and begin to grow clams.

This they will do; our new and general alarm would assure us of that, even if the Massachusetts clam-diggers were not leading the way. But Rhode Island already has one thriving clam farm of her own at Rumstick Point along the Narragansett. The clam shall not perish from our tidal flats. Gone from long reaches where once it

was abundant, small and scattering in its present scanty beds, the clam (the long-neck clam) shall again flourish, and all of New England shall again rejoice and be glad.

We are beginning, as a nation, while still the years are fat with plenty, to be troubled lest those of the future come hungry and lean. Up to the present time our industrial ethics have been like our evangelical religion, intensely, narrowly individualistic, — *my* salvation at all costs. "Dress-goods, yarns, and tops" has been our industrial hymn and prayer. And religiously, even yet, I sing of my own salvation: —

> While in this region here below,
> *No other good will I pursue:*
> I 'll bid this world of noise and show,
> With all its glittering snares, adieu;

A most un-Christian sentiment truly, and all too common in both religion and business, yet far from representing, to-day, the guiding spirit of either business or religion. For the growing conception of human brotherhood is mightily expanding our narrow religious selfishness; and the dawning revelation of industrial solidarity is not only making men careful for the present prosperity of the

ends of the earth, but is making them concerned also for the future prosperity of the Farther-Off.

Priests and prophets we have had heretofore. "Woodman, woodman, spare that tree," they have wailed. And the flying chips were the woodman's swift response. The woodman has not heard the poet's prayer. But he is hearing the American public's command to let the sapling alone; and he is beginning to heed. It is a new appeal, this for the sapling; there is sound scientific sense in it, and good business sense, too. We shall save our forests, our watersheds, and rivers; we shall conserve for time to come our ores and rich deposits; we shall reclaim the last of our western deserts, adopt the most forlorn of our eastern farms; we shall herd our whales of the Atlantic, our seals of the Pacific, number and multiply our truant schools of mackerel that range the waters of the sea; just as we shall restock with clams the waste, sandy shores of the sea, shores which in the days of Massasoit were as fruitful as Eden, but which through years of digging and no planting have become as barren as the bloodless sands of the Sahara.

It is a solemn saying that one will reap, in the

course of time, what one sows — even clams if one sows clams; but it is a more solemn saying that one shall cease to reap, after a time, and for all eternity, what one has not sown — even clams out of the exhausted flats of the New England coast, and the sandy shores of her rivers that run brackish to the sea.

Hitherto we have reaped where we have not sown, and gathered where we have not strawed. But that was during the days of our industrial pilgrimage. Now our way no longer threads the wilderness, where manna and quails and clams are to be had fresh for the gathering. Only barberries, in my half-wild uplands, are to be had nowadays for the gathering. There are still enough barberries to go round without planting or trespassing, for the simple, serious reason that the barberries do not carry their sugar on their bushes with them, as the clams carry their salt. The Sugar Trust carries the barberries' sugar. But soon or late every member of that trust shall leave his bag of sweet outside the gate of Eden or the Tombs. Let him hasten to drop it now, lest once inside he find no manner of fruit, for his eternal feeding, but barberries!

We have not sown the clam hitherto: we have only digged; so that now, for all practical purposes, that is to say, for the old-time, twenty-five-cent, rock-weed clambake, the native, uncultivated clam has had its day; as the unenterprising, unbelieving clammers themselves are beginning to see.

The Providence River fishermen are seeking distant flats for the matchless Providence River clams, bringing them overland from afar by train. So, too, in Massachusetts, the distinguished Duxbury clams come out of flats that reach all the way from the mouth of the St. Johns, on the down-east coast, to the beds of the Chesapeake. And this, while eight hundred acres of superb clam-lands lie barren in Duxbury town, which might be producing yearly, for the joy of man, eighty thousand bushels of real Duxbury clams!

What a clambake Duxbury does not have each year! A multitude of twice eighty thousand might sit down about the steaming stones and be filled. The thought undoes one. And all the more, that Duxbury does not hunger thus alone. For this is the story of fifty other towns in Massachusetts, from Salisbury down around the Cape to

Dighton — a tale with a minus total of over two million bushels of clams, and an annual minus of nearly two millions of dollars to the clammers.

Nor is this the story of Massachusetts alone, nor of the tide-flats alone. It is the story of the whole of New England, inland as well as coast. The New England farm was cleared, worked, exhausted, and abandoned. The farmer was as exhausted as his farm, and preferring the hazard of new fortunes to the certain tragedy of the old, went West. But that tale is told. The tide from New England to the West is at slack ebb. There is still a stream flowing out into the extreme West; rising in the Middle Western States, however, not in the East. The present New England farmers are staying on their farms, except where the city buyer wants an abandoned farm, and insists upon its being abandoned at any price. So will the clammer stay on his shore acres, for his clams shall no more run out, causing him to turn cod-fisher, or cranberry-picker, or to make worse shift. The New England clam-digger of to-day shall be a clam-farmer a dozen years hence; and his exhausted acres along shore, planted, cultivated, and protected by law, shall yield him a

good living. A living for him and clams for us; and not the long-neck clams of the Providence River and Duxbury flats only: they shall yield also the little-neck clams and the quahaug, the scallop, too, the oyster, and, from farther off shore, the green-clawed lobster in abundance, and of a length the law allows.

Our children's children may run short of coal and kerosene; but they need never want for clams. We are going to try to save them some coal, for there are mighty bins of it still in the earth, while here, besides, are the peat-bogs — bunkers of fuel beyond the fires of our imaginations to burn up. We may, who knows? save them a little kerosene. No one has measured the capacity of the tank; it has been tapped only here and there; the plant that manufactured it, moreover, is still in operation, and is doubtless making more. But whether so or not, we still may trust in future oil, for the saving spirit of our new movement watches the pipes that carry it to our cans. There is no brand of economy known to us at present that is more assuring than our kerosene economy. The Standard Oil Company, begotten by Destiny, it would seem, as dis-

tributor of oil, is not one to burn even its paraffine candles at both ends. There was, perhaps, a wise and beneficent Providence in its organization, that we might have five gallons for fifty-five cents for our children's sake — a price to preserve the precious fluid for the lamps of coming generations.

But should the coal and kerosene give out, the clam, I say, need not. The making of Franklin coal and Standard Oil, like the making of perfect human character, may be a process requiring all eternity, — longer than we can wait, — so that the present deposits may some time fail; whereas the clam comes to perfection within a summer or two. The coal is a dead deposit; the clam is like the herb, yielding seed, and the fruit tree, yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself upon the earth. All that the clam requires for an endless and an abundant existence is planting and protection, is — conservation.

Except for my doubts about a real North Pole, my wrath at the Payne-Aldrich Tariff, my dreadful fears at the vast smallness of our navy (I have a Japanese student in a class of mine!), "and one thing more that may not be" (which,

probably, is the "woman question" or the roundness of the "Square Deal") — except, I say, for a few of such things, I were wholly glad that my lines have fallen unto me in these days, when there are so many long-distant movements on foot; glad though I can only sit at the roadside and watch the show go by. I can applaud from the roadside. I can watch and dream. To this procession of Conservators, however (and to the anti-tariff crowd), I shall join myself, shall take a hand in saving things by helping to bury every high protectionist and planting a willow sapling on his grave, or by sowing a few "spats" in a garden of clams. For here in the opposite direction moves another procession, an endless, countless number that go tramping away toward the desert Future without a bag of needments at their backs, without a staff to stay them in their hands.

The day of the abandoned farm is past; the time of the adopted, of the *adapted*, farm has come. We are not going to abandon anything any more, because we are not going to work anything to death any more. We shall not abandon even the empty coal mines hereafter, but turn them into mushroom cellars, or to uses yet un-

dreamed. We have found a way to utilize the arid land of the West — a hundred and fifty thousand acres of it at a single stroke, as President Taft turns the waters of the Gunnison River from their ancient channel into a man-made tunnel, and sends them spreading out

> Here and there,
> Everywhere,
> Till his waters have flooded the uttermost creeks and the low-lying lanes,
> And the *desert* is meshed with a million veins, —

in order that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet, saying, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose."

We are utilizing these arid lands, reclaiming the desert for a garden, with an effort of hands and a daring of soul, that fall hardly short of the original creative work which made the world — as if the divine fiat had been: "In our image, to have dominion; to subdue the earth; and to finish the work we leave undone." And while we are finishing these acres and planting them with fruit at so lavish a cost, shall we continue stupidly

and criminally to rob, despoil, and leave for dead these eleven thousand acres of natural clam garden on the Massachusetts coast? If a vast irrigating work is the divine in man, by the same token are the barren mountain slopes, the polluted and shrunken rivers, the ravished and abandoned plough-lands, and these lifeless flats of the shore the devils in him — here where no reclaiming is necessary, where the rain cometh down from heaven, and twice a day the tides flow in from the hills of the sea!

There are none of us here along the Atlantic coast who do not think with joy of that two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-acre garden new-made yonder in the distant West. It means more, and cheaper, and still fairer fruit for us of the East; more musk-melons, too, we hope; but we know that it cannot mean more clams. Yet the clam, also, is good. Man cannot live on irrigated fruit alone. He craves clams — clams as juicy as a Redlands Bartlett, but fresh with the salty savor of wind-blown spray.

And he shall have them, for the clam farm — the restocked, restored flat of earlier times — has passed the stage of theory and experiment, being

now in operation on the New England shore, a producing and very paying property.

The clam farm is not strictly a new venture, however, but up to the present it has been a failure, because, in the first place, the times were not ripe for it; the public mind lacked the necessary education. Even yet the state, and the local town authorities, give the clam-farmer no protection. He can obtain the state's written grant to plant the land to clams, but he can get no legal protection against his neighbor's digging the clams he plants. And the farm has failed, because, in the second place, the clam-farmer has lacked the necessary energy and imagination. A man who for years has made his bread and butter and rubber boots out of land belonging to everybody and to nobody, by simply digging in it, is the last man to build a fence about a piece of land and *work* it. Digging is only half as hard as "working"; besides, in promiscuous digging one is getting clams that one's neighbor might have got, and there is something better than mere clams in that.

But who will plant and wait for a crop that anybody, when one's back is turned, and, indeed,

when one's back is n't turned, can harvest as his own? Yet this the fishing laws of Massachusetts still allow. Twenty years ago, in 1889, grants were made for clam farms in and around the town of Essex, but no legal rights were given with the grants. Any native of Essex, by these old barnacled laws, is free to help himself to clams from any town flat. Of course the farm failed.

Meantime the cry for clams has grown louder; the specialists in the new national college of conservators have been studying the subject; "extension courses," inter-flat conventions, and laboratory demonstrations have been had up and down the coast; and as a result, the clam farm in Essex, since the reissue of the grants in 1906, has been put upon a hopeful, upon a safe and paying basis.

It is an interesting example of education, — a local public sentiment refined into an actual, dependable public conscience; in this case largely through the efforts of a state's Fish and Game Commission, whose biologists, working with the accuracy, patience, and disinterestedness of the scientist, and with the practical good sense of the farmer, made their trial clam gardens pay,

demonstrating convincingly that a clam-flat will respond to scientific care as readily and as profitably as a Danvers onion-bed or the cantaloupe fields at Rocky Ford.

This must be the direction of the new movement for the saving of our natural resources — this roundabout road of education. Few laws can be enacted, fewer still enforced, without the help of an awakened public conscience; and a public conscience, for legislative purposes, is nothing more than a thorough understanding of the facts. As a nation, we need a popular and a thorough education in ornithology, entomology, forestry, and farming, and in the science and morality of corporation rights in public lands. We want sectionally, by belts or states, a scientific training for our specialty, as the shell-fish farmer of the Massachusetts coast is being scientifically trained in clams. These state biologists have brought the clam men from the ends of the shore together; they have plotted and mapped the mollusk territory; they have made a science of clam-culture; they have made an industry of clam-digging; and to the clam-digger they are giving dignity and a sense of security that make him respect himself

and his neighbor's clams — this last item being a most important change in the clam-farm outlook.

With so much done, the next work — framing new laws to take the place of the old fishing laws — should be a simple matter. Such a procedure will be slow, yet it is still the only logical and effective one. Let the clam-digger know that he can raise clams; let New England know that the forests on her mountains must be saved, and within a twelvemonth the necessary bills would be passed. So with the birds, the fish, the coal of Alaska, and every other asset of our national wealth. The nation-wide work of this saving movement will first be educative, even by way of scandals in the Cabinet. We shall hasten very slowly to Congress and the legislatures with our laws. The clam-flat is typical of all our multitudinous wealth; the clam-digger is typical of all of us who cut, or mine, or reap, or take our livings, in any way, directly from the hands of Nature; and the lesson of the clam farm will apply the country over.

We have been a nation of wasters, spoiled and made prodigal by over-easy riches; we have demanded our inheritance all at once, spent it, and

as a result we are already beginning to want — at least for clams. At this moment there are not enough clams to go round, so that the market-man sticks the end of a rubber hose into his tub of dark, salty, fresh-shucked clams, and soaks them; soaks them with fresh water out of rusty iron pipes, soaks them, and swells them, whitens them, bloats them, sells them — ghastly corpses, husks, that we would fain fill our soup-bowls with; for we are hungry, and must be fed, and there are not enough of the unsoaked clams for a bowl around.

But there shall be. With the coming of the clam farm there shall be clams enough, and oysters and scallops; for the whole mollusk industry, in every flat and bar and cove of the country, shall take to itself a new interest, and vastly larger proportions. Then shall a measure of scallops be sold for a quarter, and two measures of clams for a quarter, and nothing, any more, be soaked.

For there is nothing difficult about growing clams, nothing half so difficult and expensive as growing corn or cabbage. In fact, the clam farm offers most remarkable opportunities, although the bid, it must be confessed, is pretty plainly to one's

love of ease and one's willing dependence. To begin with, the clam farm is self-working, ploughed, harrowed, rolled, and fertilized by the tides of the sea; the farmer only sowing the seed and digging the crop. Sometimes even the seed is sown for him by the hands of the tide; but only on those flats that lie close to some natural breeding-bar, where the currents, gathering up the tiny floating "spats," and carrying them swiftly on the flood, broadcast them over the sand as the tide recedes. While this cannot happen generally, still the clam-farmer has a second distinct advantage in having his seed, if not actually sown for him, at least grown, and caught for him on these natural breeding-bars, in such quantities that he need only sweep it up and cradle it, as he might winnow grain from a threshing floor. In Plum Island Sound there is such a bar, where it seems that Nature, in expectation of the coming clam farm, had arranged the soil of the bar and the tidal currents for a natural set of clam-spats to supply the entire state with its yearly stock of seed.

With all of this there is little of romance about a clam farm, and nothing at all spectacular about its financial returns. For clams are clams, whereas

cobalt and rubber and wheat, and even squabs and ginseng roots, are different, — according to the advertisements. The inducements of the clam farm are not sufficient to cause the prosperous Middle-West farmer to sell out and come East, as he has been selling out and going on to the farther West, for its larger, cheaper farms, and bigger crops. Farming, mining, lumbering, whatever we have had to do, in fact, directly with Nature, has been for us, thus far, a speculation and a gamble. Earnings have been out of all proportion to investments, excessive, abnormal. We do not earn, we *strike* it rich; and we have struck it rich so long in this vast rich land, that the strike has lost its element of luck, being now the expected thing, which, failing to happen, we sell out and move on to the farthest West, where there is still a land of chance. But that land is passing, and with it is passing the lucky strike. The day is approaching when a man will pay for a western farm what he now pays for an eastern farm — the actual market value, based upon what the land, in expert hands, can be made yearly to yield. Values will rise to an even, normal level; earnings will settle to the same level; and the clam

farm of the coast and the stock farm of the prairie will yield alike — a living; and if, when that day comes, there is no more "Promised Land" for the American, it will be because we have crossed over, and possessed the land, and divided it among us for an inheritance.

When life shall mean a living, and not a dress-parade, or an automobile, or a flying-machine, then the clam farm, with its two or three acres of flats, will be farm enough, and its average maximum yield, of four hundred and fifty dollars an acre, will be profits enough. For the clammer's outfit is simple, — a small boat, two clam-diggers, four clam-baskets, and his hip-boots, the total costing thirty dollars.

The old milk farm here under the hill below me, with its tumbling barn and its ninety acres of desolation, was sold not long ago for six thousand dollars. The milkman will make more money than the clam man, but he will have no more. The milk farm is a larger undertaking, calling for a larger type of man, and developing larger qualities of soul, perhaps, than could ever be dug up with a piddling clam-hoe out of the soft sea-fattened flats. But that is a question of

men, not of farms. We must have clams; somebody must dig clams; and matters of the spirit all aside, reckoned simply as a small business, clam-farming offers a sure living, a free, independent, healthful, outdoor living — and hence an ample living — to thousands of men who may lack the capital, or the capabilities, or, indeed, the time for the larger undertakings. And viewed as the least part of the coming shell-fish industry, and this in turn as a smallest part of the coming national industry, due to our reclaiming, restocking, and conserving, and wise leasing, the clam farm becomes a type, a promise; it becomes the shore of a new country, a larger, richer, longer-lasting country than our pioneer fathers found here.

For behold the clam crop how it grows! — precisely like any other crop, in the summer, or more exactly, from about the first of May to the first of December; and the growth is very rapid, a seed-clam an inch long at the May planting, developing in some localities (as in the Essex and Ipswich rivers) into a marketable clam, three inches long by December. This is an increase in volume of about nine hundred per cent. The

little spats, scattered broadcast over the flat, burrow with the first tide into the sand, where with each returning tide they open their mouths, like young birds, for their meal of diatoms brought in by the never-failing sea. Thus they feed twice a day, with never too much water, with never a fear of drouth, until they are grown fat for the clammer's basket.

If, heretofore, John Burroughs among the uncertainties of his vineyard could sing, —

> Serene, I fold my hands and wait, —

surely now the clammer in his cottage by the sea can sing, and all of us with him, —

> The stars come nightly to the sky;
> The tidal wave comes to the sea;
> Nor time, nor space, nor deep, nor high,
> Can keep my own away from me.

IX

THE COMMUTER'S THANKSGIVING

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HE cottages are closed; the summer people have gone back to the city; only the farmers and the commuters — barnacled folk — remain as the summer tide recedes, fixed to the rocks of winter because they have grown fast. To live is to have two houses: a country house for the summer, a city house for the winter; to close one, and open the other; to change, to flit!

How different it used to be when I was a boy — away yonder in the days of farms and old-fashioned homes and old-time winters! Things were prepared for, were made something of, and enjoyed in those days — the "quiltings," the "raisings," the Thanksgivings! What getting ready there used to be — especially for the winter! for what was n't there to get ready! and how much of everything to get ready there used to be!

It began along in late October, continuing with more speed as the days shortened and hurried us into November. It must all be done by Thanks-

giving Day — everything brought in, everything housed and battened down tight. The gray lowering clouds, the cold snap, the first flurry of snow, how they hastened and heartened the work! Thanksgiving found us ready for winter, indoors and out.

The hay-mows were full to the beams where the swallows built; the north and west sides of the barnyard were flanked with a deep wind-break of corn-fodder that ran on down the old worm-fence each side of the lane in yellow zigzag walls; the big wooden pump under the turn-o'-lane tree by the barn was bundled up and buttoned to the tip of its dripping nose; the bees by the currant bushes were double-hived, the strawberries mulched, the wood all split and piled, the cellar windows packed, and the storm-doors put on. The very cows had put on an extra coat, and turned their collars up about their ears; the turkeys had changed their roost from the ridge-pole of the corn-crib to the pearmain tree on the sunny side of the wagon-house; the squirrels had finished their bulky nests in the oaks; the muskrats of the lower pasture had completed their lodges; the whole farm — house, barn, fields, and wood-

lot — had shuffled into its greatcoat, its muffler and muffetees, and settled comfortably down for the winter.

The old farmhouse was an invitation to winter. It looked its joy at the prospect of the coming cold. Low, weather-worn, mossy-shingled, secluded in its wayward garden of box and bleeding-hearts, sheltered by its tall pines, grape-vined, hop-vined, clung to by creeper and honeysuckle, it stood where the roads divided, halfway between everywhere, unpainted, unpretentious, as much a part of the landscape as the muskrat-lodge; and, like the lodge, roomy, warm, and hospitable.

Round at the back, under the wide, open shed, a door led into the kitchen, another led into the living-room, another into the storeroom, and two big, slanting double-doors, scoured and slippery with four generations of sliders, covered the cavernous way into the cellar. But they let the smell of apples up, as the garret door let the smell of sage and thyme come down; while from the door of the storeroom, mingling with the odor of apples and herbs, filling the whole house and all my early memories, came the smell of broom-corn, came the sound of grandfather's loom.

Behind the stove in the kitchen, fresh-papered like the walls, stood the sweet-potato box (a sweet potato must be kept dry and warm), an ample, ten-barrel box, full of Jersey sweets that *were* sweet, — long, golden, syrupy potatoes, grown in the warm sandy soil of the "Jethro Piece." Against the box stood the sea-chest, fresh with the same paper and piled with wood. There was another such chest in the living-room near the old fireplace, and still another in grandfather's work-room behind the "tem-plate" stove.

But wood and warmth and sweet smells were not all. There was music also, the music of life, of young life and of old life — grandparents, grandchildren (about twenty-eight of the latter). There were seven of us alone — a girl at each end of the seven and one in the middle, which is Heaven's own mystic number and divine arrangement. Thanksgiving always found us all at grandfather's and brimming full of thanks.

That, of course, was long, long ago. Things are different nowadays. There are as many grandfathers, I suppose, as ever; but they don't make brooms in the winter any more, and live on farms. They live in flats. The old farm with its open

acres has become a city street; the generous old farmhouse has become a speaking-tube, kitchenette and bath — all the "modern conveniences"; the cows have evaporated into convenient cans of condensed "milk"; the ten-barrel box of potatoes has changed into a convenient ten-pound bag, the wood-pile into a convenient five-cent bundle of blocks tied up with a tarred string, the fireplace into a convenient moss-and-flame-painted gas-log, the seven children into one, or none, or into a convenient bull-terrier pup. Still, we may give thanks, for convenient as life has become to-day, it has not yet all gone to the dogs.

It is true, however, that there might be fewer dogs and more children, possibly; fewer flats and more farms; less canned milk (or whatever the paste is) and more real cream. Surely we might buy less and raise more, hire less and make more, travel less and see more, hear less and think more. Life might be quieter for some of us; profounder, perhaps, for others of us, — more inconvenient indeed, for all of us, and yet a thing to be thankful for.

It might, but most of us doubt it. It is not for the things we possess, but only for the things we

have not, for the things we are relieved of, the things we escape, — for our conveniences, — that we are thankful nowadays. Life is summed up with us in negations. We tally our conveniences only, quick-detachable-tired, six-cylindered, seventy-horse-powered conveniences. To construct eighteen-million dollars' worth of destruction in the shape of a gunboat! to lay out a beautiful road and then build a machine to "eat it"! to be allotted a span of time and study how to annihilate it! O Lord, we thank Thee that we have all the modern conveniences, from cucumbers at Christmas to a Celestial Crêche! Heaven is such a nice, fit, convenient place for our unborn children! God is their home. The angels take such gentle care of them! Besides, they are not so in the way there; and, if need be, we have the charity children and other people's children; or we have the darling little sweet-faced bull-terrier pup.

For myself, I have never had a little cherub-faced bull-pup, but at this present writing I am helping to bring up our fourth baby, and I think I see the convenience of the pup. And I am only the *father* of the baby at that!

To begin with, you can buy a pup. You can

send the stable-man after it. But not a baby. Not even the doctor can fetch it. The mother must go herself after her baby — to Heaven it may be; but she will carry it all the way through Hell before she brings it to the earth, this earth of sunlit fields and stormy skies, so evidently designed to make men of babies. A long perilous journey this, across a whole social season.

Certainly the little dog is a great convenience, and as certainly he is a great negation, — the substitution, as with most conveniences, of a thing for a self.

Our birth may be a sleep and a forgetting, but life immediately after is largely an inconvenience. That is the meaning of an infant's first strangling wail. He is protesting against the inconvenience of breathing. Breathing is an inconvenience; eating is an inconvenience; sleeping is an inconvenience; praying is an inconvenience; but they are part and parcel of life, and nothing has been done yet to relieve the situation, except in the item of prayer. From prayer, and from a multitude of other inconveniences, not mentioned above, that round out life (death excepted), we have found ways of escape — by borrowing, rent-

ing, hiring, avoiding, denying, until life, which is the sum of all inconveniences, has been reduced to its infantile nothingness — the protest against the personal effort of breathing which is existence.

Not so for the Commuter. He is compelled to live. I have been reckoning up my inconveniences: the things that I possess; the things I have that are mine; not rented, borrowed, hired, avoided, but claimed, performed, made, owned; that I am burdened with, responsible for; that require my time and my hands. And I find that, for a fairly full life there are inconveniences enough incidental to commuting.

To begin with, there is the place of the Commuter's home. Home? Yes, no doubt, he has a home, but where is it? Can Heaven, besides the Commuter, find out the way there?

You are standing with your question at the entrance of the great terminal station as the wintry day and the city are closing, and it is small wonder that you ask if God knows whither, over the maze of tracks reaching out into the night, each of this commuting multitude is going. But follow one, any one of the bundled throng — this one,

this tired, fine-faced Scotchman of fifty years whom we chanced to see during the day selling silks behind the counter of a department store.

It is a chill November evening, with the meagre twilight already spent. Our Commuter has boarded a train for a nineteen-mile ride; then an electric car for five miles more, when he gets off, under a lone electric light, swinging amid the skeleton limbs of forest trees. We follow him, now on foot, down a road dark with night and overhanging pines, on past a light in a barn, and on — when a dog barks, a horse whinnies, a lantern flares suddenly into the road and comes pattering down at us, calling, "Father! father!"

We stop at the gate as father and daughter enter the glowing kitchen. A moment later we hear a cheerful voice greeting the horse, and then, had we gone closer to the barn, we might have heard the creamy tinkle of milk, spattering warm into the bottom of the tin pail.

Heaven knew whither, over the reaching rails, this tired seller of silks was going. Heaven was there awaiting him. The yard-stick was laid down at half-past five o'clock; at half-past six by the clock the Commuter was far away, farther than

the other side of the world, in his own small barn where they neither sell silk nor buy it, but where they have a loft full of fragrant meadow hay, and keep a cow, and eat their oatmeal porridge with cream.

It is an inconvenient world, this distant, darkened, unmapped country of the Commuter. Only God and the Commuter know how to get there, and they alone know why they stay. But there are reasons, good and sufficient reasons — there are inconveniences, I should say, many and compelling inconveniences, such as wife and children, miles in, miles out, the isolation, the chores, the bundles — loads of bundles — that keep the Commuter commuting. Once a commuter, always a commuter, because there is no place along the road, either way, where he can put his bundles down.

Bundles, and miles in, and miles out, and isolation, and children, and chores? I will count them all.

The bundles I have carried! And the bundles I have yet to carry! to "tote"! to "tote"! But is it all of life to be free from bundles? How, indeed, may one so surely know that one has a hold

upon life as when one has it done into a bundle? Life is never so tangible, never so compact and satisfactory as while still wrapped up and tied with a string. One's clothes, to take a single example, as one bears them home in a box, are an anticipation and a pure joy — the very clothes that, the next day, one wears as a matter of course, or wears with disconcerting self-consciousness, or wears, it may be, with physical pain.

Here are the Commuter's weary miles. Life to everybody is a good deal of a journey; to nobody so little of a journey, however, as to the Commuter, for his traveling is always bringing him home.

And as to his isolation and his chores it is just the same, because they really have no separate existence save in the urban mind, as hydrogen and oxygen have no separate existence save in the corked flasks of the laboratory. These gases are found side by side nowhere in nature. Only water is to be found free in the clouds and springs and seas — only the union of hydrogen and oxygen, because it is part of the being of these two elements to combine. So is it the nature of chores and isolation to combine — into water, like hydro-

gen and oxygen, into a well of water, springing up everlastingly to the health, the contentment, and to the self-sufficiency of the Commuter.

At the end of the Commuter's evening journey, where he lays his bundles down, is home, which means a house, not a latch-key and "rooms"; a house, I say, not a "floor," but a house that has foundations and a roof, that has an outside as well as inside, that has shape, character, personality, for the reason that the Commuter and not a Community, lives there. Flats, tenements, "chambers," "apartments" — what are they but public buildings, just as inns and hospitals and baths are, where you pay for your room and ice-water, or for your cot in the ward, as the case may be? And what are they but unmistakable signs of a reversion to earlier tribal conditions, when not only the cave was shared in common, but the wives and children and the day's kill? The differences between an ancient cliff-house and a modern flat are mere details of construction; life in the two would have to be essentially the same, with odds, particularly as to rooms and prospect, in favor of the cliff-dweller.

The least of the troubles of flatting is the flat;

the greatest is the shaping of life to fit the flat, conforming, and sharing one's personality, losing it indeed! I'll commute first! The only thing I possess that distinguishes me from a factory shoe-last or an angel of heaven is my personality. Shoe-lasts are known by sizes and styles, angels by ranks; but a man is known by what he is n't, and by what he has n't, in common with anybody else.

One must commute, if one would live in a house, and have a home of one's own, and a personality of one's own, provided, of course, that one works in New York City or in Boston or Chicago; and provided, further, that one is as poor as one ought to be. And most city workers are as poor as they ought to be — as poor, in other words, as I am.

Poor! Where is the man rich enough to buy Central Park or Boston Common? For that he must needs do who would make a city home with anything like my dooryard and sky and quiet. A whole house, after all, is only the beginning of a home; the rest of it is dooryard and situation. A house is for the body; a home for body and soul; and the soul needs as much room outside

as inside the house, — needs a garden and some domestic animal and the starry vault of the sky.

It is better to be cramped for room within the house than without. Yet the yard need not be large, certainly not a farm, nor a gentleman's estate, nor fourteen acres of woodchucks, such as my own. Neither can it be, for the Commuter, something abandoned in the remote foothills, nor something wanton, like a brazen piece of sea-sand "at the beach."

The yard may vary in size, but it must be of soil, clothed upon with grass, with a bush or a tree in it, a garden, and some animal, even if the tree has to grow in the garden and the animal has to be kept in the tree, as with one of my neighbors, who is forced to keep his bees in his single weeping willow, his yard not being large enough for his house and his hive. A bee needs considerable room.

And the soul of the Commuter needs room, — craves it, — but not mere acres, nor plentitude of things. I have fourteen acres, and they are too many. Eight of them are in woods and gypsy moths. Besides, at this writing, I have one cow,

one yearling heifer, one lovely calf, with nature conspiring to get me a herd of cows; I have also ten colonies of bees, which are more than any Commuter needs, even if they never swarmed; nor does he need so many coming cows.

But with only one cow, and only one colony of bees, and only one acre of yard, still how impossibly inconvenient the life of the Commuter is! A cow is truly an inconvenience if you care for her yourself — an inherent, constitutional, unexceptional inconvenience are cows and wives if you care for them yourself. A hive of bees is an inconvenience; a house of your own is an inconvenience, and, according to the figures of many of my business friends, an unwarranted luxury. It is cheaper to rent, they find. "Why not keep your money in your business, where you can turn it?" they argue. "Real estate is a poor investment generally, — so hard to sell, when you want to, without a sacrifice."

It is all too true. The house, the cow, the children, are all inconvenient. I can buy two quarts of blue Holstein milk of a milkman, typhoid and scarlet-fever germs included, with much less inconvenience than I can make my

yellow-skinned Jersey give down her fourteen quarts a day. I can live in a rented house with less inconvenience than in this house of my own. I am always free to go away from a rented house, and I am always glad to go. The joy of renting is to move, or sublet; to be rid also of taxes and repairs.

"Let the risers rot! It is n't my house, and if I break my neck I 'll sue for damages!"

There is your renter, and the joy he gets in renting.

There are advantages, certainly, in renting; your children, for instance, can each be born in a different house, if you rent; and if they chance to come all boys, like my own, they can grow up at the City Athletic Association — a convenient, and more or less permanent place, nowadays, which may answer very well their instinctive needs for a fixed abode, for a home. There are other advantages, no doubt. But however you reckon them, the rented house is in the end a tragedy, as the willful renter and his homeless family is a calamity, a disgrace, a national menace. Drinking and renting are vicious habits. A house and a bit of land of your own are as neces-

sary to normal living as fresh air, food, a clear conscience, and work to do.

If so, then the question is, Where shall one make his home? "Where shall the scholar live?" asks Longfellow; "In solitude or in society? In the green stillness of the country, where he can hear the heart of Nature beat, or in the dark gray city, where he can feel and hear the throbbing heart of man? I make answer for him, and say, In the dark, gray city."

I should say so, too, and I should say it without so much oracular solemnity. The city for the scholar. He needs books, and they do not grow in cornfields. The pale book-worm is a city worm, and feeds on glue and dust and faded ink. The big green tomato-worm lives in the country. But this is not a question of where scholars should live; it is where *men* should live and their children. Where shall a man's home be? Where shall he eat his supper? Where lay him down to sleep when his day's work is done? Where find his odd job and spend his Sunday? Where shall his children keep themselves usefully busy and find room to play? Let the Commuter, not the scholar, make answer.

The Commuter knows the dark gray city, knows it darker and grayer than the scholar, for the Commuter works there, shut up in a basement, or in an elevator, maybe, six days a week; he feels and hears the throbbing heart of man all the day long; and when evening comes he hurries away to the open country, where he can hear the heart of Nature beat, where he can listen a little to the beating of his own.

Where, then, should a man live? I will make answer only for myself, and say, Here in Hingham, right where I am, for here on Mullein Hill the sky is round and large, the evening and the Sunday silences are deep, the dooryards are wide, the houses are single, and the neighborhood ambitions are good kitchen-gardens, good gossip, fancy chickens, and clean paint.

There are other legitimate ambitions, and the Commuter is not without them; but these few go far toward making home home, toward giving point and purpose to life, and a pinch of pride.

The ideal home depends very much, of course, on the home you had as a child. I can think of nothing so ideally homelike as a farm, — an ideal farm, ample, bountiful, peaceful, with the smell

of apples coming up from the cellar, and the fragrance of herbs and broom-corn haunting storeroom and attic.

The day is past when every man's home can be his farm, dream as every man may of sometime having such a home; but the day has just arrived when every man's home can be his garden and chicken-pen and dooryard, with room and quiet and a tree.

The day has come, for the means are at hand, when life, despite its present centralization, can be more as it used to be — spread out, roomier, simpler, healthier, more nearly normal, because again lived near to the soil. It is time that every American home was built in the open country, for there is plenty of land — land in my immediate neighborhood for a hundred homes where children can romp, and your neighbor's hens, too, and the inter-neighborhood peace brood undisturbed. And such a neighborhood need not be either the howling wilderness, where the fox still yaps, or the semi-submerged suburban village, where every house has its Window-in-Thrums. The Commuter cannot live in the wild country, else he must cease to commute; and as for small-

village life — I suppose it might be worse. It is not true that man made the city, that God made the country, and that the devil made the village in between; but it is pretty nearly true, perhaps.

But the Commuter, it must be remembered, is a social creature, especially the Commuter's wife, and no near kin to stumps and stars. They may do to companion the prophetic soul, not, however, the average Commuter, for he is common and human, and needs his own kind. Any scheme of life that ignores this human hankering is sure to come to grief; any benevolent plan for homesteading the city poor that would transfer them from the garish day of the slums to the sweet solitudes of unspoiled nature had better provide them with copies of "The Pleasures of Melancholy" and leave them to bask on their fire-escapes.

Though to my city friends I seem somewhat remote and incontiguous, still I am not dissevered and dispersed from my kind, for I am only twenty miles from Boston Common, and as I write I hear the lowing of a neighbor's cows, and the voices of his children as they play along the brook below, and off among the fifteen square miles of treetops that fill my front yard, I see

faint against the horizon two village spires, two Congregational spires, once one, that divided and fell and rose again on opposite sides of the village street. I often look away at the spires. And I as often think of the many sweet trees that wave between me and those tapering steeples, where they look up to worship toward the sky, and look down to scowl across the street.

Any lover of the city could live as far out as this. I have no quarrel with the city as a place to work in. Cities are as necessary as wheat-fields and as lovely, too — from twenty miles away, or from Westminster Bridge at daybreak. The city is as a head to the body, the nervous centre where the multitudinous sensations are organized and directed, where the multitudinous and inter-related interests of the round world are directed. The city is necessary; city work is necessary; but less and less is city living necessary.

It is less and less possible also. New York City — the length and breadth of Manhattan — and Boston, from the Fenway in three directions to the water-front, are as unfit for a child to grow up in as the basement floor of a china store for a calf. There might be hay enough on such a floor

for a calf, as there is doubtless air enough on a New York City street for a child. It is not the lack of things — not even of air — in a city that renders life next to impossible there; it is rather the multitude of things. City life is a three-ringed circus, with a continuous performance, with interminable side-shows and peanuts and pink lemonade; it is jarred and jostled and trampled and crowded and hurried; it is overstimulated, spindling, and premature — it is too convenient.

You can crowd desks and pews and workbenches without much danger, but not outlooks and personalities, not beds and doorsteps. Men will work to advantage under a single roof; they cannot sleep to advantage so. A man can work under almost any conditions; he can live under very few.

Here in New England — as everywhere — the conditions of labor during the last quarter-century have vastly changed, while the conditions of healthful living have remained essentially as they ever were, as they must continue to remain for the next millennium.

Some years ago I moved into an ancient house in one of the oldest of New England towns. Over

the kitchen I found a room that had to be entered by ladder from without. That room was full of lasts and benches — all the kit necessary for shoemaking on a small scale. There were other houses scattered about with other such rooms — closed as if by death. Far from it. Yonder in the distance smoked the chimney of a great factory. All the cobblers of these houses had gathered there to make shoes by machine. But where did they live? and how? Here in the old houses where their fathers lived, and as their fathers lived, riding, however, to and from their work on the electric cars.

I am now living in an adjoining town, where, on my drive to the station, I pass a small hamlet of five houses grouped about a little shop, through whose windows I can see benches, lasts, and old stitching-machines. Shoes were once made here on a larger scale, by more recent methods. Some one is building a boat inside now. The shoemakers have gathered at the great factory with the shoemakers of the neighbor town. But they continue to live in the hamlet, as they used to, under the open sky, in their small gardens. And they need to. The conditions of their work have

quite changed; the simple, large needs of their lives remain forever the same.

Let a man work where he will, or must; let him live where only the whole man can live — in a house of his own, in a yard of his own, with something green and growing to cultivate, something alive and responsive to take care of; and let it be out under the sky of his birthright, in a quiet where he can hear the wind among the leaves, and the wild geese as they *honk* high overhead in the night to remind him that the seasons have changed, that winter is following down their flying wedge.

As animals (and we are entirely animal) — we are as far under the dominion of nature as any ragweed or woodchuck. But we are entirely human too, and have a human need of nature, that is, a spiritual need, which is no less real than the physical. We die by the million yearly for lack of sunshine and pure air; and who knows how much of our moral ill-health might be traced to our lack of contact with the healing, rectifying soul of the woods and skies?

A man needs to see the stars every night that the sky is clear. Turning down his own small lamp, he should step out into the night to see the

pole star where he burns or "the Pleiads rising through the mellow shade."

One cannot live among the Pleiads; one cannot even see them half of the time; and one must spend part of one's time in the mill. Yet never to look for the Pleiads, or to know which way to look, is to spend, not part, but all of one's time in the mill.

> The dales for shade,
> The hills for breathing space,

and life for something other than mere work!

The Commuter is bound to see the stars nightly, as he goes down to shut up the hens. He has the whole outdoors in his yard, with the exception of a good fish-pond; but if he has no pond, he has, and always will have, to save him from the round of the mill, a little round of his own — those various endless, small, inconvenient home-tasks, known as "chores." To fish is "to be for a space dissolved in the flux of things, to escape the calculable, drop a line into the mysterious realms above or below conscious thought"; to "chore" is for a space to stem the sweeping tides of time, to outride the storms of fate, to sail serene the sea of life — to escape the mill!

Blessed is the man who has his mill-work to do, perfunctory, necessitous, machine-work to do; twice blessed the man who has his mill-work to do and who loves the doing of it; thrice blessed the man who has it, who loves it, and who, besides, has the varied, absorbing, self-asserting, self-imposed labors about his own barn to perform!

There are two things in the economy of unperverted nature that it was never intended, I think, should exist: the childless woman and the choreless man. For what is a child but a woman with a soul? And what is a chore? Let me quote the dictionary: —

"*Chore*, *char*, a small job; especially a piece of minor domestic work, as about a house or barn; . . . generally in the plural."

A small, domestic, plural job! There are men without such a job, but not by nature's intention; as there are women without children, and cows without cream.

What change and relief is this small, domestic, plural job from the work of the shop! That work is set and goes by the clock. It is nine hours long, and all in the large or all in the infinitesimally small, and all alike. It may deal with millions,

but seldom pays in more than ones and twos. And too often it is only for wages; too seldom is it for love — for one's self.

Not so this small domestic job. It is plural and personal, to be done for the joy of doing it. So it ought to be with these Freshmen themes that I go on, year after year, correcting; so it ought to be with the men's shoes that my honest neighbor goes on, year after year, vamping. But the shoes are never all vamped. Endless vistas of unvamped shoes stretch away before him down the working days of all his years. He never has the joy of having finished the shoes, of having a change of shoes. But recently he reshingled his six by eight hencoop and did a *finished* piece of work; he trimmed and cemented up his apple tree and did a finished piece of work; he built a new step at the kitchen door and did a finished piece of work. Step and tree and hencoop had beginnings and ends, little undertakings, that will occur again, but which, for this once, were started and completed; small, whole, various domestic jobs, thrice halting for him the endless procession, — the passing, the coming, the trampling of the shoes.

And here are the teachers, preachers, writers, reformers, politicians — men who deal, not in shoes, but in theories, ideals, principalities, and powers, those large, expansive, balloonish commodities that show the balloon's propensity to soar and to explode — do they not need ballast as much as the shoemaker, bags of plain sand in the shape of the small domestic job?

During some months' stay in the city not long ago, I sent my boys to a kindergarten. Neither the principal nor the teachers, naturally, had any children of their own. Teachers of children and mothers' advisers seldom have. I was forced to lead my dear lambs prematurely forth from this Froebel fold, when the principal, looking upon them with tears, exclaimed, "Yes, your farm is no doubt a *healthful* place, but they will be so without guidance! They will have no one out there to show them how to play!"

That dear woman is ballooning, and without a boy of her own for ballast. Only successful mothers and doting old grandfathers (who can still go on all fours) should be allowed to kindergarten. Who was it but old Priam, to whom Andromache used to lead little Astyanax?

The truth is, all of the theorizing, sermonizing, inculcating professions ought to be made strictly avocational, strictly incidental to some real business. Let our Presidents preach (how they love it!); let our preachers nurse the sick, catch fish, or make tents. It is easier for the camel, with both his humps, to squeeze through the eye of the needle than for the professional man of any sort to perform regularly his whole duty with sound sense and sincerity.

But ballast is a universal human need — chores, I mean. It is my privilege frequently to ride home in the same car with a broker's bookkeeper. Thousands of dollars' worth of stock pass through his hands for record every day. The "odor" of so much affluence clings to him. He feels and thinks and talk in millions. He lives over-night, to quote his own words, "on the end of a telephone wire." That boy makes ten dollars a week, wears "swagger clothes," and boards with his grandmother, who does all his washing, except the collars. What ails him? and a million other Americans like him? Only the need to handle something smaller, something realer than this pen of the recording angel — the need

of chores. He should have the wholesome reality of a buck-saw twice a day; he might be saved if he could be interested in chickens; could feed them every morning, and every evening could "pick up the eggs."

So might many another millionaire. When a man's business prohibits his caring for the chickens, when his affairs become so important that he can no longer shake down the furnace, help dress one of the children, or tinker about the place with a hammer and saw, then that man's business had better be put into the hands of a receiver, temporarily; his books do not balance.

I know of a college president who used to bind (he may still) a cold compress about his head at times, and, lying prone upon the floor, have two readers, one for each ear, read simultaneously to him different theses, so great was the work he had to do, so fierce his fight for time — time to lecture to women's clubs and to write his epoch-making books.

Oh, the multitude of epoch-making books!

But as for me, I am a Commuter, and I live among a people who are Commuters, and I have stood with them on the banks of the Ohio, ac-

cording to the suggestion of one of our wisest philosophers (Josh Billings, I think), and, in order to see how well the world could get on without me, I have stuck my finger into the yellow current, pulled it out, and looked for the hole.

The placid stream flowed on.

So now, when the day's work is done, I turn homeward here to Mullein Hill, and these early autumn nights I hang the lantern high in the stable, while four shining faces gather round on upturned buckets behind the cow. The lantern flickers, the milk foams, the stories flow — "Bucksy" stories of the noble red-man; stories of Arthur and the Table Round, of Guyon and Britomart, and the heroes of old; and marvelous stories of that greatest hero of them all — their father, far away yonder when he was a boy, when there were so many interesting things to do, and such fun doing them!

Now the world is so "full of a number of things" — things to do still, but things, instead of hands, and things instead of selves, so many things to do them with — even a *thing* to milk with, now! But I will continue to use my hands.

No, I shall probably never become a great milk-contractor. I shall probably remain only a Commuter to the end. But if I never become anything great, — the Father of my Country, or the Father of Poetry, or the Father of Chemistry, or the Father of the Flying Machine, — why, I am at least the father of these four shining faces in the lantern light; and I have, besides them, handed down from the past, a few more of life's old-fashioned inconveniences, attended, gentle reader, with their simple old-fashioned blessings.

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